



## Individual Study

# Japan's Proactive Contribution to Peace: Implications in the Region and Policy Recommendations for Thailand

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รายงานการศึกษาส่วนบุคคล  
(Individual Study)

เรื่อง นโยบายความมั่นคงเชิงรุกเพื่อส่งเสริมสันติภาพของญี่ปุ่น:  
ผลกระทบต่อภูมิภาคและข้อเสนอแนะเชิงนโยบายต่อไทย

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รายงานนี้เป็นความคิดเห็นเฉพาะบุคคลของผู้ศึกษา



เอกสารรายงานการศึกษาส่วนบุคคลนี้ อนุมัติให้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการฝึกอบรม  
หลักสูตรนักบริหารการทูตของกระทรวงการต่างประเทศ

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## Abstract

The perceived change in Japanese security policy is a result of Japan undergoing a gradual transformation since as early as the end of the Cold War. Over the past several decades, Tokyo has reluctantly given up its passive security policy stance and gradually relinquished former pacifist principles. New challenges and the increased expectations of Japan's ally, the US, have led Japan to adjust its policies as Japan's security interests have gradually evolved to align with the US. The DPRK's missile and nuclear programme and China's gradual rise as an economic and military power, in particular, have forced the country into closer security cooperation with Washington, which in the event of a crisis would also require Japan to contribute militarily. In view of the complex security environment, the Abe administration seeks to better protect the country from security risks and influence regional developments to Japan's advantage. The alliance with the US remains the linchpin of Japan's foreign and security policy.

In terms of content, Abe has to a large extent followed on from initiatives and considerations already in existence; much of which was put in place during the Koizumi term in the early 2000's. Japan drafted a national security policy and established a national security council for the first time in 2013. It lifted restrictions for arms export and military equipment in 2014.

In July 2014, the Abe Cabinet revised the constitutional interpretation to lift the country's self-imposed ban on collective self-defense. A set of national security bills to give the reinterpretation substance is now under deliberations at the Diet, scheduled to conclude by September 2015. Despite public resentment against the security bills, and high tensions building up, Prime Minister Abe will likely push through for adoption of the bills. The timing is right and political momentum is high. These security bills are necessary tools for Tokyo to comply with the recently revised Japan – US Defense Alliance aimed at closer cooperation to enhance the deterrence effect.

Still, Abe seems to believe that the reinterpretation, which only allows the limited use of collective self-defense, is not enough. Looking ahead, he probably envisions a constitutional amendment to enable the country to conduct collective self-defense without restraint. Abe appears to have two main underlying motives in pursuing his security reform ambitions. Firstly, to leave a family legacy behind, as Abe is deeply influenced by his nationalist grandfather, Prime Minister Kishi, who also

pursued the same ambitions in the 1950s and was consequently forced to resign. Abe's political ambition is to normalize Japan's military. The current constitution bears the humiliation of being drafted by foreigners (the US) while Japan was under shame and defeat from war. Secondly, Japan's economy would benefit from reinvigorating the military industry and arms manufacturers/exporters who happen to be influential supporters of the LDP. Japan's economic performance as Abe pushes forward his last arrow of the Abenomics policy is also a determining factor.

Japan's overreliance on the US - Japan alliance is a risk factor. As the Obama administration appears to have taken a softer stance towards China, Japan becomes more nervous and insecure. Therefore, Japan has sought to diversify its security policy relations with other partners in the region to deter against China.

Reactions to Tokyo's shift in its security paradigm are mixed but largely negative both from the Japanese public as well as countries in the region. The only countries that support Japan are its alliances; the US, Australia, New Zealand, and China's antagonists, the Philippines.

Thailand has been pressured by the Japanese Government to support Japan's bid to be a proactive contributor to peace in the region. These actions have put ASEAN members on spot, undermining ASEAN centrality and unity. How Thailand and ASEAN respond to Japan's actions is important and calls for careful consideration. This study suggests Thailand uses the underlying motives for Japan's actions to its advantage. Apart from using this as a balancing act against China, Thailand should enhance security and economic cooperation with Japan to advance its own national policies, and strengthen its regional role to address security concerns.

From a realist point of view, as China gets wealthier and stronger, it will become uncontrollable. The US and Japan will have to eventually come to terms with China's emergence, and make room for China on equal footing, as an economic competitor as well as a strategic competitor for influence in East Asia.

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## Glossary of Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADMM	ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
AMF	Asian Monetary Fund
APEC	Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CLMV	Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam
DPJ	Democratic Party of Japan
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
EAS	East Asia Summit
ECS	East China Sea
FTAAP	Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
NCPO	National Council for Peace and Order
NSC	National Security Council
NSS	National Security Strategy
NDPG	National Defense Programme Guidelines
PKO	Peacekeeping Operations
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
ROK	Republic of Korea
SCS	South China Sea
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Rationale

When defense practitioners, scholars and diplomats in the Asia-Pacific region talk about Japan these days, the focus of their attention is drawn to the recent changes in Japan's security policies under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe known as "Proactive Contribution to Peace." Both the policy itself and Abe's actions to implement the policy have raised questions and garnered mixed reactions in the region, albeit, largely negative.

It appears to the least, that through these strategic changes, Abe not only wants to bring Japan out of its economic stagnation but also intends to prevent any further deterioration in the country's geopolitical significance and return Japan to its former strength. He also seems to want to show China that in its readiness to deter against aggression from China, Japan was ready to become more aggressive itself.

Prime Minister Abe has been criticized for departing from the traditional precepts of Japanese security policy and his intention to reform the country's pacifist post-war constitution. Since the 1950's and following Japan's remarkable economic success after the second world war, Tokyo has constantly been pressured by Washington to step up efforts to contribute more to the region militarily. But Tokyo remained resilient and argued the necessity to focus on rebuilding the country due to post war damages, as well as the sensitivities of countries in the region as a result of Japan's war crimes and atrocities.

However, Japan's and the US interests would later on realign towards a common goal when China's rise appeared to be more assertive than peaceful, both economically and politically. Japan needed to respond to this new security threat, and as Abe stepped in to take up his premiership for the second time in 2012, the timing was ripe for Japan to announce its new security ambitions and proactive role in the region. This was in fact, an idea that had already been put forward earlier by Prime Minister Koizumi during his premiership in 2001-2006, but circumstances were not yet mature for Koizumi to bring his ambitions to fruition.

Specifically, several reforms introduced by Abe have given rise to concern, above all in China and the Republic of Korea as well as among the Japanese public.

These changes are; the first increase in the defense budget in years (fiscal year 2013); the introduction of a National Security Council and a National Security Strategy (December 2013); the relaxation of arms export restrictions (April 2014); and the reinterpretation of the Article 9 of the Constitution, normalizing Japanese Defense Forces operations (July 2014).

## **1.2 Objectives and Research Questions**

This paper will examine (1) the elements of Japan's Proactive Contribution to Peace, the underlying reasons and origins of the concept; (2) the impact upon major players in the region and their reactions; and finally, (3) it will offer some policy recommendations to the Thai Foreign Ministry so that an appropriate response could be formulated in order to serve both Thailand's and ASEAN's interests.

## **1.3 Scope of Research and Methodology**

As a diplomat directly involved with Thailand's bilateral relations with Japan, the author seeks through this research not only to understand Japan's intentions, but to also pan out possible scenarios within the region as a result of Japan's security ambitions. Since the author has access to classified and/or internal documents used in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand and the Ministry of Defense of Thailand, she will use these to draw descriptive analyses and documentary research, combined with information obtained from primary sources such as the author's direct encounters, interactions and discussions with involved practitioners both in Thailand and Japan. These will be described in Chapter 2.

Realism and balance of power theory will be applied to analyze and predict possible scenarios as consequences of Japan's proactive contribution to peace policy in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 will draw conclusions from the study and offer possible policy recommendations for the Thai Foreign Ministry to adjusting itself in response to the changes within the region.

In drawing analyses for this study, there exists certain limitations. A set of national security bills to legitimize the Japanese Cabinet decision to reinterpret the Constitution and allow Japan's Self-Defense Forces to exercise the right to collective self defense, is still under deliberations at the Japanese Parliament or Diet. To date, the bills have been approved at the Lower House and is now awaiting further deliberation from the Upper House.

According to legislative procedures, after sixty days, if the Upper House has not reached a decision, the bills could be resubmitted to the Lower House to put

into law. Abe has postponed Diet sessions to the end of September to allow time for smoother deliberation of the security bills by that time frame.

However, public protest against Abe's actions have been widespread and so controversial, that academicians are challenging the constitution court to reinterpret the Cabinet's decision last year to reinterpret Article 9 of the Constitution. They maintain that the Cabinet decision was unconstitutional. There is a possibility for Japan's Constitution Court to overrule the challenge, but at this stage, other events may unfold that influence public sentiment and any constitutional court ruling. This illustrates the high fluctuation of the situation surrounding this topic. Therefore, this paper will scope only observations or predictions of an Upper House decision, which should be reached by the end of September 2015.

The author hopes that this study may offer food for thought for policy – makers in the Thai Foreign Ministry and suggest new avenues to serve Thailand's national interest, where appropriate.

#### **1.4 Relevance to Thai Foreign Policy: Why We Need to Understand Japan**

Japan's new security posture has resonated concerns and reactions in the region in an environment already tense from China's increasing assertiveness. Since Thailand is recognized as an active player in ASEAN and strategic partner of both Japan and China there has been considerable rivalry between China and Japan to compete for Thailand's support both ways. In this sense, it is important for Thailand's decision-makers to understand the underlying reasons and reactions caused by such animosity, as it is also a national interest for Thailand to ensure that the fragile and emerging economies of the Mekong Sub-Region continue to have a stable environment to maintain Thailand's own economic growth and consequently political stability.

To many observers, these developments constitute a radical change in Japan's security policy. Major changes also include comprehensive efforts to strengthen defense alliances with the United States and Australia, as well as draw support from members of ASEAN to join in Japan's strategic defense ambitions in the region. In April 2015, Japan revised its Defense Guidelines with the United States for the first time in 18 years, making significant 'upgrades' in the alliance. Allowing both sides to have 'seamless bilateral responses' to threats indicated that Japan and the United States would be able to undertake joint military action anywhere in the world. This was signed and sealed during Abe's historical visit to the United States in late April 2015, despite the notion that this was a violation of Japan's Constitution.

In May 2015, Japan also agreed to join the United States and Australia in their military exercise for the first time, scheduled to be held in July 2015. The Talisman Sabre biennial exercises usually take place in locations around Australia and encompass maritime operations, amphibious landings, special forces tactics and urban warfare. On top of that, there is a looming chance that Australia will buy submarine technology from Japan. These deals have been encouraged and staged by Washington, and are widely perceived as efforts to curb China's influence in the region, both politically and economically, sandwiching China in between US allies from the North by Japan and to the South by Australia.

The mistrust shown towards Abe is not surprising. His track record shows that he is a revisionist politician who downplays Japan's responsibility for war and atrocities in the first half of the 20th century. In neighbouring China and the Republic of Korea, which were hit particularly hard by Japanese aggression during the said period, suspicion over Abe's security agenda runs deep and is understandable. Southeast Asian nations, as well as Thailand, were also among those who suffered under Japanese ambitions to dominate the world during World War II.

However, now into his second term of leadership, Abe has drawn many lessons from his mistakes during his tenure of his previous premiership. It can be observed that Abe indeed has become more pragmatic and understands that his mandate for re-election is primarily, to rescue Japan from economic stagnation.

Most reactions, both domestically and regionally, are caused by a sense of fear that Japan will have history repeating itself as Tokyo lifts military restrictions in order to gain greater regional influence. Japan's war atrocities still hover very closely over the background. Tokyo rejects such fears as unfounded and reassures the public that its goals are to actively contribute to international peace, which, to Japan, is befitting, considering recent assertive actions by China, and an unpredictable leadership in the DPRK.

However, the official statements proclaimed by Tokyo, are not one and the same as what diplomats have witnessed through closed door sessions and sideline talks.

At the 14th Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore in late May 2015 which I took part in, apart from the usual China-bashing due to land reclamation activities in the South China Sea, some attention was drawn to Japan's recent military build up and proactive contribution to peace. After his statement at one of the plenary sessions, General Nakatani, Japan's Defense Minister, was posed a question that was riding in the minds of many participants of the event. Would Japan interpret threats in the

South China Sea as a legitimate reason to send Japanese Self Defense Forces on a mission to restore order if an incident were to occur? Not surprisingly, General Nakatani answered many questions from the floor, but left the podium without acknowledging even the notion of this particular one.

Moments after the plenary was over, I met with Ambassador Shingo Yamagami, Deputy Director-General, Foreign Policy Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, who also was a frequent participant at the Shangri-La Dialogue and had accompanied General Nakatani this year. We had met earlier in March 2015, when Tokyo hosted the 12th session of the Thai-Japanese Politico-Military, Military-Military meeting, also known as the PM/MM, where senior officials of both ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense met to discuss the security issues of the region and bilateral cooperation. I quickly directed the same question to him. Would Japan consider incidents in the South China Sea a legitimate reason to send troops over to the South China Sea?

His response, delivered with a smile, was not the usual reassuring official position claiming that Japan only wanted to be more responsive and responsible in maintaining peace and order in the region. Instead, he made a point of whispering to me a message that resonated substantially loud and clear, “Of course Japan is interested. But we don’t want to go too public at this stage.” Coming from one of Tokyo’s key policy-makers, this was a response not to be taken lightly. I reported back to Bangkok, sounding my concerns<sup>1</sup>. Japan’s “not wanting to go public at this stage” flagged something important. Firstly, that Japan had not yet gained domestic support to legitimize its military ambitions, and secondly, it had yet to secure support from partners in the region, particularly from ASEAN as a whole, and especially not from Thailand. Hence, Tokyo wanted to avoid rocking the boat before the actual storm. The underlying question was, therefore, was Japan contemplating the possibility of a scenario where the South China Sea could be used as a platform to show case Japan’s military might against China, as a ‘proactive’ deterrence measure for China to steer clear from the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea?

In fact, Tokyo had already probed the public with this idea earlier. During the US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter’s visit to Tokyo in April 2015, both defense ministers had leaked the notion that the Japanese and US governments were

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<sup>1</sup>Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, Memo No. 1305/ -/2558, June 2015, 14<sup>th</sup> IISS Shangri-La Dialogue Report, East Asian Affairs Department.

considering the possibility of having the Self-Defense Forces and US military conduct joint patrols and surveillance in the South China Sea Japan argued that it was in Japan's own interest to ensure the stability of sea lanes to import crude oil, which is not entirely untrue<sup>2</sup>.

As Japan and China remain divided over the Japan-administered Senkaku Islands otherwise known as Diaoyu Islands by the Chinese in the East China Sea, a possible extension of the Japan Self Defense Forces activity to the South China Sea could provoke backlash from China. The verbal warning had signaled to some extent, the notion that Japan and the US would be working together to police the region and contain China's military assertiveness.

At the same time, Tokyo has been systematically lobbying hard for ASEAN members to show explicit support for its proactive pacifism, in particular, to support its cabinet decision to reinterpret the Constitution in order to normalize JSDF military operations. Japan is implying that it has matured to the extent that it must take on the role of helping the US police the region before the security threats in the region grow too complex to overcome. It was telling ASEAN members that the threat from China's assertiveness was a worrying factor and that Japan would be the solution to help balance out China's influence in the region.

However, ever since the Cabinet approved on 1 July 2014 to reinterpret the Constitution, reactions from members of ASEAN have not been as supportive as Japan might have liked. This is why Japan started to embark upon a series of Track II activities such as conferences, seminars and briefings held by think tanks of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense to explain Japan's intentions and garner support on its proactive role in the region.

Efforts from Tokyo have intensified as reactions in the region remain unchanged. The Foreign Ministry dispatched diplomatic representatives to capitals of ASEAN members to study their perceptions of Japan and their positions on Japan's proactive pacifism.

In March 2015, the East Asian Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand received such a delegation from the Foreign Ministry's Division of Public Diplomacy. As the delegation proceeded to display a power point presentation outlining Japan's public diplomacy strategies entitled; "Japan's Public Diplomacy: Current Circumstances and Challenges." But in contrast to reality, the Japanese side

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<sup>2</sup> The Japan Times News, [Japan, U.S. consider joint surveillance in South China Sea](http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/04/19/national/japan-u-s-consider-joint-surveillance-in-south-china-sea/#.VYolCGD1JmA) [Online], Apr 19, 2015, Available from <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/04/19/national/japan-u-s-consider-joint-surveillance-in-south-china-sea/#.VYolCGD1JmA>.

spent time during the hour-long meeting asking why Thailand's head of delegation at the 12th PM/MM meeting in Tokyo earlier that same month, would not commit to supporting Japan's 1st of July 2014 Cabinet Decision? Thailand's answer remained the same. A cabinet decision of one country was that country's internal affairs, which Thailand could not possibly comment on, unless it directly affected Thailand. As for Japan's intentions to increase its role to secure security in the region, Thailand had already voiced its support in a Joint Press Statement on the Official Visit of Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-Cha to Japan in February 2015;

“...Prime Minister Prayut highly appreciated Japan's enduring efforts as a peace-loving nation and its long-standing contribution to the economic growth not only in South East Asia but also beyond. On that basis, Prime Minister Prayut also expressed his support to Japan's more active role for regional and global peace and prosperity under the policy of “Proactive Contribution to Peace” based on the principle of international cooperation...”<sup>3</sup>

Japan wanted Thailand, as a close friend of China and a strategically important partner to both Japan and China, to show its explicit support for a more assertive Japan. Even if it meant that Thailand had to choose between China or Japan. Evidently, the support in principle by Thailand was not enough for the Japanese side. It had drawn no protest and little attention from China, because China had been busy pushing forward its bilateral cooperation with Thailand, and in fact, using the political vacuum to its advantage. China was already many steps ahead of Japan. During the recent political coup of 2014 in Thailand, Japan had taken a wrong turn and chose to shun Thailand for several months right after to express retaliation against Thailand's straying from democracy.

The Thai Prime Minister had already visited China in November 2014 before visiting Japan, as China hosted the APEC Summit, and was already looking ahead towards securing a railway deal with Thailand, alongside a deal to import excess Thai agricultural products to help resolve Thailand's domestic problems. Next in the pipeline was a deal for Thailand to procure Chinese military equipment. In fact, a decision for Thailand to purchase Chinese submarines was just recently announced in late June 2015, to be again renounced after facing opposition a few weeks later in July 2015.

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<sup>3</sup>Prayut Chan-o-cha, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand, [Japan-Thailand Joint Press Statement on the Occasion of the Visit](#), 9February 2015.



Realizing that shunning Thailand would only bring China closer to Thailand by default, benefitting China instead of teaching Thailand a lesson, Japan quickly redeemed itself and pushed hard to strengthen engagement with Thailand's Defense Ministry. During his introductory call on Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, General Prawit Wongsuwan on 24 June 2015, the recently appointed Japanese Ambassador to Thailand, Mr. Shiro Sadoshima, wasted no time in conveying an invitation to General Prawit to visit Tokyo in his capacity as Defense Minister as soon as possible. This was also with the prospect of signing a bilateral agreement on defense cooperation with Japan, paired with talks on how to facilitate Thailand's possible purchase of military equipment from Japan.

Thailand was also doing a good job as country coordinator for ASEAN and China, and making progress in ASEAN's view because China had agreed to engage in frequent talks with ASEAN on the early conclusion of a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea. But in reality, this also allowed China to bide time while the territorial disputes in the South China Sea could not yet be settled as China wanted, while China continued its land reclamation activities in the Spratly Islands. These were all negative developments in Japan's view and despite Japan's voicing concerns for ASEAN to strengthen the EAS (East Asia Summit), it had already lost faith and patience in the ASEAN process and its ability to resolve regional tensions through ASEAN security arrangements. In this sense, China's growing influence on Thailand and ASEAN was an important push factor for Japan to be more assertive as well.

The changes in Abe's security policy must be seen within the context of the constantly shifting regional environment, and the reaction of domestic politics as a result thereof. Japan feels threatened above all by China, which is modernizing its military and assertively pursuing its foreign policy, as well as by North Korea's nuclear and missile programmes. Abe's reforms are the logical consequence of Japan's gradual realignment of its security, the result of a long process of transformation and adjustment that Tokyo has been undergoing since as early as the end of the Cold War. Coincidentally, this is now also aligned with US strategic and security interests.

Japan's strengthening of its military capability has continued steadily without increasing budget. Even without so, Japan has been able to develop maritime military technology that is among the most advanced of the world. Even the controversial reinterpretation of Article 9 of the Constitution merely formalizes what is already in practice.

The alliance with the US continues to receive top priority, but at the same time Tokyo has intensified its cooperation with partners like Australia, India and some

Southeast Asian countries like the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam. By opting to increase military cooperation with partners other than the US, Japan has created new room for maneuver, even if scarce financial resources may limit Tokyo's ability to play a stronger security role (Yoshihara, 2014). Because of this, the Abe administration is also under pressure to revive the country's economy and bring Japan back to a sustaining and healthy growth. This also depends on whether the economic reforms under the "Abenomics" policy actually yields results as it promised, and also if the Japanese public will allow Abe to push on with the drastic financial reforms which is generally unpopular among the public.

Even though the Abe administration has relaxed military constraints, it should not be mistaken as a start of a new militarism. Japan's population is still extremely skeptical about the use of military power and the government has a long way to go to convince their public and justify its actions. Abe's policies run the risk of ostracizing China, challenge ASEAN centrality and role in determining the regional architecture and overall cause tensions in the region rather than easing them. His emphasis in foreign policy statements on values such as democracy, rule of law and human rights adds to suspicions in Beijing that Japan is assisting or even replacing the US in pursuing a containment strategy.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

Understanding Japan's new security ambitions will require examination of the geopolitical dynamics surrounding Japan in the region, the US - Japan Alliance, as well Japan's state of domestic politics and economy, which may be the principal cause pushing Abe to transform his country into what is perceived as a new assertive, nationalistic and potentially dangerous Japan. Japan has been Thailand's top investor for decades and intends to stay just as important, if not the most important ally in Thailand's eyes. Abe has pointed this out at the past four summits with General Prayut since the Thai Prime Minister took office in September 2014. Abe has also stressed Thailand's value to Japan as a regional strategic partner. As the leading economy in the Mekong Sub-Region which also happens to be the new source of economic growth in the region, it is vital for Japan to maintain a firm foothold in Thailand. Particularly also because Thailand is strategically China's backyard, Japan has been pressing hard for Thailand to be on board with Japan in its pursuit as a proactive contributor to peace in the region.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

This chapter will use realism and balance of power theories to conceptualise the theoretical framework of this study. These theories will be used to explain the behaviours or responses of major players in the region as a result from the proactive contribution to peace policy. The sections thereafter in the Chapter will elaborate the changes made to Japan's new security paradigm and explain the surrounding factors that have led to Prime Minister Abe's decision to push forward his security policies, as suggested by observers and academicians in Japanese Studies. A conclusion is offered at the end of the Chapter to recapture the existing literature review.

#### 2.1 Theoretical Framework: Realism and Balance of Power Theory in International Relations

Classical realism and the balance of power theory offer fundamental propositions about international politics. It gives us an understanding of the nature of man, the state and the international system, why conflicts and wars occur, and how these could be avoided. Major contributors to the traditional realist and balance of power theories include Hans Morgenthau, Edward Carr and Kenneth Waltz.<sup>4</sup>

Realists believe that power is the currency of international politics. Great powers are the main actors in the realists' perspective, and these pay careful attention to how much economic and military power they have relative to each other. It is important not only to have a substantial amount of power, but also to make sure that no other state sharply shifts the balance of power in its favour. For realists, international politics is synonymous with power politics. States compete and are in constant conflict for advantage while in pursuit of national interest always exists.

There are, however, substantial differences among realists. Classical realists like Morgenthau, state that human nature is the key characteristic that makes states

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<sup>4</sup>John J. Mearsheimer, Structural Realism [Online], 2005, Available from: <http://mearsheimer.uchicago.edu/pdfs/StructuralRealism.pdf>.

want power. Humans are born with a will for power programmed into them, which effectively means that great powers are led by individuals who are bent on having their state dominate its rivals. Nothing can be done to alter that drive to be all-powerful. Power is defined by Morgenthau as basically, man's control over the minds and actions of other men or the ability to convince people to behave in a certain way. In military terms, he sees power as either the threat of use of force or the actual use of force in war. Use of power can be legitimate or illegitimate, depending on the existence or not of moral and legal justifications.<sup>5</sup>

According to Morgenthau, the balance of power can be understood as a situation or as a policy. As a situation, the balance of power could be in equilibrium or disequilibrium, depending on the status of the distribution of power between states. The balance of power as a policy often refers to a state's actual efforts to reach or preserve equilibrium. This is commonly found in situations where the existence of unbalanced power is unsafe. However, the act of balancing power can also trigger disequilibrium. Means to change power balance can be done through changing the status quo, through various means. First, through weakening a hostile state by keeping it divided. Second, through territorial compensation. Third, is through arms races or disarmament. Lastly, by establishing stronger alliances. Alliances can destabilise a peaceful situation in at least five ways; (1) by enabling aggressive states to combine military capabilities for aggression; (2) by threatening enemies and provoking them to form counter-alliances; (3) by drawing otherwise neutral parties into opposed coalitions; (4) by controlling the behavior of allies, discouraging them from activities that would undermine the security of the alliances' other members.

These scenarios imply that no one state is a permanent ally or enemy of another state, since the alliance balancing process can be very unstable and become complex. However, given that states commonly acknowledge the importance of sovereignty of each state, the balance of power could be used to maintain a pluralist international system.

Another category, structural realists, postulate that human nature has little to do with why states want power. Instead, it is the structure or architecture of the international system that forces states to pursue power. In a system where there is no higher authority that sits above the great powers, and where there is no

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<sup>5</sup>Peter Toledo, [Classic Realism and the Balance of Power Theory](http://gjis.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/gjis/article/download/35205/31924) [Online], 2005, Available from: <http://gjis.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/gjis/article/download/35205/31924>.

guarantee that one will not attack another, it makes good sense for each state to be powerful enough to protect itself in the event it is attacked. In essence, great powers are trapped in an iron cage where they have little choice but to compete with each other for power if they hope to survive.

Structural realist theories ignore cultural differences among states as well as differences in regime type, mainly because the international system creates the same basic incentives for all great powers. Therefore, it makes no difference whether a state is democratic or autocratic. Nor does it matter much who is in charge of conducting a state's foreign policy. States are assumed to be alike, save for the fact that some states are more or less powerful than others.

Among structural realists, there are two different schools; Defensive realists like Kenneth Waltz, maintain that it is unwise for states to try to maximize their share of world power, because the system will punish them if they attempt to gain too much power. However, offensive realists like John Mearsheimer take the opposite view. They maintain that it makes good strategic sense for states to gain as much power as possible and, if the circumstances are right, to pursue hegemony. The argument is not that conquest or domination is good in itself, but instead that having overwhelming power is the best way to ensure one's own survival. For classical realists, power is an end in itself; for structural realists, power is a means to an end and the ultimate end is survival.

Power is based on the material capabilities that a state controls. The balance of power is mainly a function of the tangible military assets that states possess, such as armoured divisions and nuclear weapons. However, states have a second kind of power, latent power, which refers to the socio-economic ingredients that go into building military power. Latent power is based on a state's wealth and the size of its overall population. Great powers need money, technology, and personnel to build military forces and to fight wars, and a state's latent power refers to the raw potential it can draw on when competing with rival states. War and increasing military capability is not the only way that states can gain power. They can also do so by increasing the size of their population and their share of global wealth, as China has done over the past few decades, and the US before China.

The importance of international and non-governmental organizations, as well as of multinational corporations began to grow as the Cold War receded in the 1970s. This development led to a revival of idealist thinking, which became known as neoliberalism or pluralism. While accepting some basic assumptions of realism, the leading pluralists, Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, have proposed the concept of

complex interdependence among nations to describe this more sophisticated picture of global politics. They would argue that there can be progress in international relations and that the future does not need to look like the past.

Realism therefore, is a practical theory that depends on the actual historical and political conditions, and is ultimately judged by its ethical standards and by its relevance in making prudent political decisions. Realism also performs a useful cautionary role. It warns us against progressivism, moralism, legalism, and other orientations that lose touch with the reality of self-interest and power. The neorealist revival of the 1970s can also be interpreted as a necessary corrective to an overoptimistic liberal belief in international cooperation and change resulting from interdependence.

The recent tensions, reactions and behavior of countries in East Asia surrounding Japan's proactive contribution to peace policy can also be explained by these theories. These will be projected in Chapter 3.

## **2.2 Japan's New Security Paradigm**

### **2.2.1 National Security Council**

Faced with the security challenges in Japan's regional environment, the Abe administration founded a National Security Council (NSC) with its own Secretariat on 4th December 2013. By conducting regular consultations every two weeks in the small circle of experts in the NSC (which comprises Prime Minister as Chairman, Chief Cabinet Secretary, Foreign Minister and Defense Minister), Abe aims to gain more influence over the country's strategy. In crisis situations, the Prime Minister can also convene sessions with the respective experts. Around 60 security policy experts from various ministries are seconded to the body for a limited time. Abe has entrusted former Deputy Foreign Minister and National Security Adviser, Shotaro Yachi to chair the secretariat of the NSC.

The institution is modeled after the US National Security Council, which plays a leading role in shaping and implementing US foreign policy. But the Japanese NSC is unlikely to attain a level of significance comparable to that of its US counterpart in terms of developing foreign policy strategy, because policies issued by the NSC must have the approval of the entire Cabinet in order to legalise decisions made by the NSC. Also, because the Prime Minister reshuffles cabinet members on average once a year, to secure the support of rival factions within the parties by rewarding them with cabinet posts, therefore, it would be difficult to ensure continuity of policies once a reshuffle takes place.

On the other hand, it is apparent that Japan is making use of its new National Security Secretariat to intensify security policy cooperation with the US and other countries. The NSC Secretariat also engages in security policy dialogue with other countries in order to gauge perceptions on security issues relevant to Japan, especially those that influence or affect the East Asian region.

The Japanese Parliament also adopted in December 2013, a law increasing penalties for disclosing sensitive information. This is seen as a response to US pressure who pointed out that the former soft penalties would make security practitioners negligent with sensitive and classified information. On the other hand, the new law also promotes exchange of administrative information across agencies, in order to improve a better more effective working platform for the NSC. This is due to a weak point in Japanese work culture. Inter-agency coordination was poor because Japanese officials had a habit of keeping information from one another owing to distrust and a hidden agenda to claim successes themselves.

### **2.2.2 National Security Strategy**

Also in December 2013, Japan established its first National Security Strategy (NSS) with the cooperation of various government agencies. The document covered foreign as well as security strategy and necessitated close cooperation between the defense and foreign ministries. Japan's security policy was therefore now established on three basic documents: NSS was Japan's overarching security strategy, followed by the ten-year National Defence Programme Guidelines (NDPG) which covered defence equipment purchase, and the five-year Mid-Term Defence Programme (breakdown of more concrete matters regarding defence equipment). Japan had recently revised the Japan-US Defence guidelines under the Japan-US Alliance in April 2015 for the very first time, after it had been setup in 1997.

Japan places greatest importance on cooperation with the international community on peacekeeping operations (PKO), United Nations (UN) collective security measures, and coordination with allies (particularly US) and partners. The Japan – US alliance remains Japan's top priority for its security policy. However, no matter how important the alliance may be, Japan does not want to lean too much on the US to help defend Japan against threats. For Abe, the time had come for Japan to finally normalize its military and self defense forces to protect and serve its nation. The long - standing alliance with the US has taught Japan well not to depend on the US who as a superpower, can easily break commitments where they clearly do not bear any gain to the US.

With the introduction of the National Security Council (NSC), Tokyo has found an institutional response to the security changes in its neighbourhood. In terms of developing foreign policy strategy, the Security Council is unlikely to wield any anywhere near as much as influence its American role model. Nevertheless, the NSC enables Tokyo to intensify its security cooperation with the US and other countries.

### **2.2.3 Proactive Contribution to Peace**

The two documents published in December 2013 provide basis to the direction of Tokyo's security policy under the Abe administration; the National Security Strategy (NSS) and the National Defense Programme Guidelines (NDPG). Both documents outline how the government intends to protect the country from threats and enhance regional and international stability. The most salient innovation in the strategy documents is the concept of "proactive pacifism." By promoting this concept, the Abe explicitly rejects the idealistic pacifist notions of the post-war period and thus justifies what he considers to be a necessary easing of military constraints to better respond to Japan's changing security concerns.

Abe intends to create better conditions for security cooperation with other countries and improve Japan's ability to influence regional developments. This actually coincides with China's security goals as well, and perhaps is among one of the reasons that brings China and Japan into more tensed conflict and direct competition in the region. For the most part, however, Abe's reforms serve merely to align existing guidelines with reality and legitimize what the Japanese government already practices.

The NSS adopted by the NSC and the Cabinet introduced binding rules for all agencies for the first time ever. Universal values such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law are listed in the documents as Japan's guiding principles. As a peace-loving nation, Japan is committed to maintaining a security policy designed exclusively for defense, not becoming a military power that poses a threat to other countries and observing the "Three Non-Nuclear Principles," i.e., neither possessing nor producing nuclear weapons nor allowing third parties to bring such weapons into the country. These basic principles are already part of the Defense Guidelines of 2010 and are found in past White or Blue Books (The Blue Book is a report on Japan's foreign policy published annually by the Japanese Foreign Ministry).



Specifically, the kind of “limited collective self defense” that Prime Minister Abe is aiming for would reinterpret Article 9 to allow, for example, the following kinds of scenarios:

- 1) defending US naval vessels on the high seas;
- 2) intercepting a ballistic missile that might be on its way to the United States;
- 3) expanding Japan’s right to use weapons in international peace operations and;
- 4) providing logistical support for the operations of other countries participating in the same UN PKO and other activities.

Under this leitmotif, Japan wants to work with international partners in order to actively contribute to international security, instead of merely reacting to events as it had done so in the past. According to the NSS, the increasingly complex challenges of today requires international policy coordination; furthermore, the only way the country can effectively pursue its national interests, such as defending its sovereignty and increasing its prosperity, is through cooperation with the international community. Although previous strategy documents have called for Japanese contributions to international peace for example in the form of international peace-keeping missions, humanitarian aid or disaster relief, the guiding principle of a “proactive pacifism” is still new in theory, in the country’s security policy. However, in practice, Japan had already been sending out PKO missions and assisting in disaster relief missions outside its territory already.

Nevertheless, the most recent strategy papers reveal little about the policy implications of the concept. Like previous papers, there is reference to three central pillars of Japanese security policy; (1) Japan’s own capabilities and defense measures; (2) the alliance with the US and; (3) cooperation with other countries. These principles do not sway away from Japan’s foreign policy.

Presently, these and other scenarios are under discussion by the Cabinet for consideration and deliberation by the Diet by September 2015.

#### **2.2.4 Relaxation of Arms Exports and Military Equipment Transfer**

On 1 April 2014, the Abe administration relaxed the rules governing arms exports. For more than 30 years, Japan’s basic policy had been not to transfer any defence equipment and technology abroad, with only limited exceptions (e. g. joint Japan-US development of military technology, such as participation of Japanese industries in F-35 fighter production). Under the new rules, “Three Principles on

Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology,” would allow defence equipment transfer under certain preconditions:

1) Transfers were prohibited if the case violated obligations under treaties and international agreements Japan had concluded; if it violated obligations under UNSC resolutions; or destined for a country that is party to a conflict.

2) Transfers were permitted only for cases that actively promoted peace and international cooperation, or contributed to Japan’s security. Currently, only certain kinds of equipment and technology could be transferred: rescue, transportation, surveillance, vigilance and minesweeping.

Transfers are limited to cases that had appropriate controls in place regarding extra-purpose use and transfers to third parties. In principle, recipient countries would have to gain prior consent from the Japanese Government. Most importantly, any transfers would require a legally-binding instrument (i. e. a Government-to-Government agreement).

The debate over relaxing or revising the rules is not new. Since the 1980s, Japan’s government has gradually watered down standards by allowing exceptions to the export ban. In 1983 Japan began to deliver defense technology to the US. In 2004 Tokyo decided to permit the joint development and production of missile defense technology in the form of a Japanese - US collaborative project. The government that preceded the Abe administration in the end gave up blanket approval to arms cooperation with friendly countries in 2011. This step paved the way for arms projects with the US, the UK, France and Australia. For example, Japan is currently developing missile technology with the UK and collaborating with Australia on submarine construction as well as a possible contract for Japan to supply next generation submarines to Australia.

The Japanese defense budget cuts have led to a steady drop in order for the domestic arms industry. Between 2003 and 2014, more than a hundred Japanese companies bowed out of the arms business. The most recent relaxation of export rules is aimed at retarding this process. The goal is to sustain Japanese arms producers and help them regain their competitiveness through exports and international collaborative projects.

By doing so, Abe could kill several birds with one stone. Easing rules to save major Japanese companies, would contribute to reviving the Japanese economy, beefing up military capabilities, and harnessing valuable support from important Japanese businesses and political lobbyists, such as internationally known manufacturers Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Sumitomo and Kawasaki Heavy Industries,

automakers, including Toyota Motor Corp., and dozens of small and medium-size specialist producers and IT firms that are unknown outside the defense industry.

According to the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI), domestic defense manufacturing amounted to about ¥1.9 trillion in 2007, or 0.6 of the nation's total industrial production. In 2007 there were about 1,300 firms involved in some capacity in the production of tanks and other military vehicles, another 1,100 building parts for the F-15J fighter jet, around 1,200 tied to Patriot missile production and some 2,200 businesses involved in constructing Aegis-equipped ships.<sup>6</sup>

A survey by the Japan Association of Defense Industry of 134 member companies showed more than half had defense contracts that accounted for 10 percent or less of their total business, while 25 firms relied on defense contracts for more than half of their business.<sup>7</sup>

The revised rules allow Japan to sell armaments from multinational projects to third countries, making it an attractive international collaborative partner. The US government had urged Japan to make this change in light of missile technology cooperation and in connection with the 2013 US-Japan equipment and technology collaboration through the participation of Japanese industries in the 11-nation F-35 aircraft development program.

Under these new rules, Japan hopes to find new customers for its arms industry in Southeast Asia. Tokyo has expressed an interest in selling ships, aircraft and submarines to Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines. Late 2014, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan invited representatives of foreign ministries and defense ministries of the ten ASEAN countries to attend a seminar and briefed ASEAN members on the new rules, giving the participants a tour of possible weapons that would be up for sales to them. Thailand was also represented.

The majority of Japan's citizens however, reject such plans. In a survey by Asahi Shimbun in 2014, only 17 percent favoured the relaxation of rules proposed by Abe, while 77 percent opposed.

### **2.2.5 Reinterpretation of the Constitution**

Although Prime Minister Abe has pursued the reinterpretation of Article 9 to facilitate "limited collective self defense" as one of the means to

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<sup>6</sup> Japan Times, [Defense Firms pushing to boost role](http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/08/12/reference/defensefirmspushing-to-boostrole/#.VZOS__mqqkp) [Online], 12 August 2013, Available from: [http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/08/12/reference/defensefirmspushing-to-boostrole/#.VZOS\\_\\_mqqkp](http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/08/12/reference/defensefirmspushing-to-boostrole/#.VZOS__mqqkp) 1/6.

<sup>7</sup>[Ibid.](#)

implement proactive pacifism, he has yet to garner support from his own LDP party, from his coalition partner the Komeito, from the DPJ (the largest opposition party) or general public, for this reinterpretation. He therefore limited himself to reinterpreting the Article 9. After fierce debating, the LDP and its coalition partner, the Komeito, agreed on such an interpretation on 1 July 2014. Under the agreement, Tokyo can take military action within the framework of collective self-defense if armed aggression is directed against a country with close ties to Japan, resulting in a threat to Japan's existence and the right of its citizens to life, freedom and the pursuit of happiness. In this interpretation, collective self defense is thus permissible if a concrete threat exists for Japan and its citizens.

Specifically, reinterpreting the constitution to allow self collective defense, would also allow Japan's military to mobilise overseas when these three conditions are met:

- 1) when Japan is attacked, or when a close ally is attacked, and the result threatens Japan's survival and poses a clear danger to people;
- 2) when there is no other appropriate means available to repel the attack and ensure Japan's survival and protect its people, and;
- 3) the use of force is restricted to a necessary minimum.<sup>8</sup>

Abe cited warding off an attack on a US vessel evacuating Japanese civilians from a crisis region or intercepting DPRK missiles fired at US troops stationed on the Pacific Island of Guam and traveling over Japanese territory as hypothetical examples of how the armed forces could be deployed. At the same time, Abe ruled out the possibility of Japanese military operations in a conflict like the Iraq war led by Washington in 2003.

The Cabinet decision also served as a response from Washington to support its Asia Rebalancing policy. Government officials in Tokyo have pointed out that in a Sino – Japanese crisis, the country can rely on the support of its ally only if it is prepared to reciprocate by standing up for the security of the US. Otherwise, they warn, there is danger that Washington could refuse Japan its support.

Abe has cited the difficult security environment as justification for reinterpreting Article 9 of the Constitution, emphasizing that the new reading does not change Japan's status as a pacifist country, nor does it change the basic principle of the constitution to characterize Japan as a peace-loving nation. He further argues

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<sup>8</sup>Cabinet Secretariat, Cabinet Decision on development of seamless security legislation to ensure Japan's survival and protect its people [Online], July 1, 2014, Available from: [http://www.cas.go.jp/jp/gaiyou/jimu/pdf/anpohosei\\_eng.pdf](http://www.cas.go.jp/jp/gaiyou/jimu/pdf/anpohosei_eng.pdf).

that partially exercising the right to collective self defense together with the US increases the deterrence potential, which in turn, reduces the chance of Japan becoming involved in a war. In an ironic way, Abe could be right. Having the assurance and commitment of a US alliance and protection could help lessen Japan's security concerns, especially with regards to China. A nervous Japan, on the other hand, is more likely to make mistakes by provoking an already wary China, increasing the risk of unwanted incidents and conflicts.

The Cabinet decision to reinterpret Article 9 facilitates closer cooperation with Japan's ally, the US. However, some LDP members have proposed even supporting the Philippines and other countries in their territorial disputes with China, as mentioned earlier, the notion of Japan's military presence in the South China Sea. However, the coalition party Komeito is strictly against such actions.

In order to exercise the collective right to self defense, Tokyo must amend more than 10 laws, including the Self Defense Forces Act. Parliamentary consultations over legislative changes could therefore take months, if not years. Despite public oppositions and severe protests in the parliament, Abe appears steadfast in maintaining his course to achieve his political legacy.

## **2.3 Factors leading up to Proactive Contribution to Peace**

### **2.3.1 Japan's Domestic Environment**

#### **2.3.1.1 Post World War II**

The idea of pacifism dates back to the comprehensive social reforms that were introduced after Japan's surrender in World War II. The US – led occupying forces carried out a series of demilitarization policies in a bid to establish a government that would respect other countries and embrace the UN Charter. The US wanted a Japan that would no longer pose a threat to them and to international peace and security. Those policies soon led to a breakdown of Japan's old systems. In contrast to militarism during the pre-war period, Japan's US – led social reforms were peaceful. With the evolution of policy adjustments, Japan gradually achieved rapid economic growth and regained recognition from the international community due to its economic success. Japan also showed remorse and apologized for its war-time aggression. Pacifism was widely accepted by the Japanese people and it laid a foundation for Japan's peaceful development. It became an integral part of Japanese society's system of values. This explains why pacifism is deeply embedded in Japanese mentality until today.

Left and right in Japan's political system were defined by their direct opposites; peace or war, reform or convention, in the early post war period. At that time, it was the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) that led the left and championed "constitutional pacifism" as its main political doctrine. The idea was that an unarmed neutral Japan would prevent a repeat of military expansion and extreme nationalism. However, during the mid-1950's the JSP eventually lost influence to the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the dominant political party in power today. Japan also adjusted its security policies—it moved from a stance of un "armed neutrality" to "international contribution and then "responsive pacifism."

Accordingly, Japan went from participating in UN peace-keeping missions in non-direct conflict zones (such as Cambodia in the 1980's) to the dispatch of unarmed Japan Self-Defense Forces to Iraq and military aid to the US. Since the year 2000, the Japanese Government has approved least fifteen major overseas deployments from the JSDF, in large part to assist in humanitarian and disaster relief missions, and even in joint missions combating piracy in Somalia. A number of approximately 4,491 JSDF personnel have been deployed in those missions. Additionally, from 1992, in a period spanning 23 years, the Japanese Government has also approved the dispatch of JSDF transport and engineer units to join six UN peacekeeping operations in Cambodia, Mozambique, the Golan Heights, Haiti and South Sudan, with sizable numbers of personnel. To date, a total number of 9,273 military personnel have been dispatched in those missions.<sup>9</sup>

All these missions were conducted under a legal framework of an unchanged pacifist constitution, meaning that Japan has been able to contribute in peacekeeping operations without the need to amend nor reinterpret its constitution. This shift from a former self-restricting JSDF, indicates that pacifism has an expanded meaning in the eyes of the conservatives, and this has triggered a heated debated between Japanese think tanks and scholars on the relationship between peace and military strength. It has also influenced Japan's Asia-Pacific and China strategies.

#### 2.3.1.2 Current Political Backdrop

Japan's international presence has traditionally been less salient in the political aspect, compared to its economic success. Its ability to pursue a fully independent foreign policy and to demonstrate decisive international political

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<sup>9</sup>IISS, "Japan and its Regional Relations: Making Common Cause." [Asia-Pacific Regional Security Assessment 2015: An IISS Strategic Dossier](#) (United Kingdom: Arundel House, May 2015).

leadership along the lines of other major industrialized powers has been seriously circumscribed since its defeat in World War II. Wartime memories in East Asia or elsewhere have left Japanese policy-makers wary of making attempts to reassert global or regional leadership. This legitimacy deficit<sup>10</sup> has been compounded by Japan's lack of its own brand of universal values that can be exported to other countries. Japan has never generated any clear international policy or values like its industrialized G7 peers. The US and European countries have imposed western principles such as liberal and democratic values into the global agenda, and therefore, permanently set a strong position in international politics. Japan has only upheld and followed the same western standards, without its own voice. Because of this, often lacked the conviction and credibility to deploy any of its own political ideology as an international norm.

However, since 2010, China replaced Japan as the world's second largest economy, following decades of 7-10 % continuous economic growth per year. It is also expected that China will surpass the US in economic power very soon. Parallel to its economic success, China has appeared to grow more proud, more assertive politically, regionally, militarily. China's rise in this sense has raised fear among neighbours in the region and most importantly, the US.

Moreover, tensions in the East China Sea between Japan and China flared up in 2012 when the Noda administration of Japan agreed to buy land in the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. The US and Japan recognize fully that China had transformed into a force to be reckoned with. China had emerged a strong competitor, and a common threat for Japan and the US, and containment of China appeared to be an aligned interest for both allies.

Abe was faced with growing tensions with its neighbours, with China increasing its territorial claims in the region and the DPRK continuing to develop its ballistic missiles and nuclear program despite international sanctions, while relations with the Republic of Korea deteriorated. More importantly perhaps was the fact that the US—the cornerstone of Japan's national defense—appeared less capable of providing the same level of security during the post war period. Even the announcement of the US Rebalancing to Asia policy did not bring much reassurance to Abe because the US simply was not present, and more or less, demanded its traditional allies in the region to step up and represent the US in the region.

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<sup>10</sup>Hook *et al.*, 2012.

After Obama's blunders in Egypt, Syrian and Crimea, senior Japanese policymakers began doubting American credibility. More recently when the US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter took office in February 2015, he appeared to take on an even softer stance towards China than his predecessor, seeking cooperation rather than confrontation. This made Japan wary that in the event of conflict with China in the East China Sea, the US might not be prepared to step in and help defend Japan as promised in their defense alliance.

Capitalizing on the general public's growing familiarity with, and trust for, the Japanese Self Defense Force, the early fruits of his economic reforms nicknamed "Abenomics" and the dramatic improvement in the armed forces preparedness, Abe revived all of his major security policy reforms which he had already planted while serving under the Koizumi administration as Chief Cabinet Secretary back in 2005, prior to serving his first term as Prime Minister in 2006. He re-launched the Advisory Panel's work on the reinterpretation of the Constitution Article 9, enacted a law promoting patriotic education in schools and increased the defense budget. With all these measures in place, and tilting in favor of Abe, the cabinet approved the historical shift from based self-defense to collective self-defense. Timing was ripe for Japan to finally announce its new security ambitions in the region.

Yet this is not the end of the road for Japan's security policy change under Abe. As developments in the global and regional levels continue to challenge Japan's historical reluctance to treat military force as a legitimate tool of international statecraft, and domestic conditions become more conducive by providing Japanese policymakers the necessary resources and legitimacy, Japan will become growingly "normal" and shed off any remaining relics of its pacifism to become a state like any other state; generally reluctant to use military force, but clearly ready to use it when needed.

#### 2.3.1.3 Abe's Political Legacy

Abe comes from a traditional family of politicians, his grandfather, Nobusuke Kishi was prime minister in the 1950s, notoriously known as an "ardent nationalist who wanted to make Japan a global power and restore its honour after World War II."<sup>11</sup> Kishi was accused but never indicted of war crimes for helping to realise imperial Japan's war ambitions in the 1930s and 1940s. At that

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<sup>11</sup>Reiji Yoshida, Formed in childhood, roots of Abe's conservatism go deep [Online], 26 December 2012, Available from: <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2012/12/26/national/formed-in-childhood-roots-of-abes-conservatism-go-deep/#.VauifmD1JmA>.



time, he oversaw a system that would draw Chinese labour and Chinese natural resources to feed Japan's growth. Later on, during his tenure as prime minister, Kishi unsuccessfully sought to rewrite the US - written postwar Japanese constitution that renounced militarism. This is precisely what Abe is seeking to do as well. He has already been partially successful through the Cabinet's approval to reinterpret Article 9 of the constitution last July 2014.

Evidence shows that Abe was heavily influenced by his grandfather at a tender age. In Abe's eyes, his grandfather was a sincere statesman who only thought about the future of this country. Kishi, who died in 1987, had long been Abe's role model as a politician. In fact, most of Abe's key positions are said to be similar or identical to those originally created by Kishi. These include a desire to amend the Constitution, to end the government's ban on collective defense, to strengthen the Japan-U.S. military alliance and to "reform" the education system by removing "problematic" left-leaning teachers. As prime minister, Kishi strengthened Japan's military alliance with the US by revising the Japanese-U.S. Security Treaty in 1960. Most observers today, including liberal, left-wing intellectuals, admit that the military alliance has enabled Japan to keep focusing its resources on economic development and helped maintain a stable security environment in Asia throughout the Cold War years. However, Kishi did not accomplish all that he had envisioned before he resigned from his second term as prime minister.

Abe was reported as saying, "Mr. Kishi accomplished the great achievement of revising the Japanese-U.S. Security Treaty. I'd like to succeed his wish to 'recover the true independence of Japan.'" And his grandson Shinzo Abe now bears the family political legacy of his grandfather Kishi. Some observers believe that the Abe has made it his noble duty as grandson to carry out the mission that his grandfather started.

But Abe is apparently not just a simple-minded nationalist. He was also groomed by his more pragmatic father the late Foreign Minister Shintaro Abe. The young Abe accompanied his father on some 20 diplomatic trips serving as a secretary to his father. He witnessed Japan's talks with world leaders, including then-Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Thus Shinzo Abe can appear to focus on diplomacy and nationalism, a sentiment that subsided amid the postwar left-leaning society's pacifism. Depending on the diplomatic situation, he can show a realistic flexibility in how he carries himself.

Leaving his career with a distinct legacy would be a significant personal family achievement in this sense. The Proactive Contribution to

Peace is a milestone shift in Japanese history since World War II. His pursuit to leave such historical legacy is therefore rooted deep from a personal level as well.

It would also serve a large nationalist political elite group that has been at the helm and behind the scenes of Japanese politics for decades, the Nippon Izokukai.<sup>12</sup> In a nutshell, the Nippon Izokukai represents Japan's war dead and was formed in 1947. It is composed of 1.5 million Japanese, the largest organisation of its time, with members widespread from local chapters in each of Japan's prefectures. Its primary goal is to ensure the honour and the memory of those who died serving their country and improving the care and social welfare of the families left behind.

The Nippon Izokukai has formed a close alliance with the LDP, as LDP – led governments supported funds to the families of the war dead in forms of government bonds and special consolation funds for Japan's war widows. Decades of such support created a seamless lobby for the families of Japan's veterans as the Izokukai became firmly involved in the Japanese government's policy-making. All but one Izokukai leader have been politicians and the current Chairman, Otsuji Hidehisa, also a prominent LDP member, is currently serving in Japan's House of Councillors representing Kagoshima, since 2013. The long and embedded ties of the Izokukai within the LDP also meant that it had a over-bearing influence over leadership of the LDP. Votes from this faction could make or break a run for both leadership of the party and the prime minister's office.

Abe as well as his father before him, is a member of the Seiwa Seisaku Kenkyukai (Seiwa political-analysis council) or the Machimura political faction in the LDP. This is a right – wing nationalist faction that is supported by the Izokukai as well as the Japan Business Federation, also more commonly known as the Keidanren. Keidanren has been the voice of major businesses in Japan and is generally considered the most conservative of the country's three major economic organizations. The other two organizations are the Japan Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Japan Committee for Economic Development.<sup>13</sup> This implies the direction of Abe's policies and how far he may go to achieve his political ambitions to change Japan's security posture, to have Japan independent of US assistance, and to equip Japan's military of necessary means to deter an increasingly

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<sup>12</sup>Sheila A. Smith, *Intimate Rivals: Japanese Domestic Politics and a Rising China* (New York: Columbia University Press, May 2015).

<sup>13</sup>Wikipedia, *Japan Business Federation* [Online], 17 March 2015, Available from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan\\_Business\\_Federation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan_Business_Federation).

assertive and challenging China as well as an unpredictable and nuclear –armed DPRK.

To some extent, eventually, the general public may grow to accept Japan's proactive pacifism, if this means Abe can prove that this will serve Japan's national interest in deterring threats from China and the DPRK, as well as elevate Japan's regional posture to a stronger, international political leadership. But as long as Japan's economy continued to stagnate, the public could perceive this as a personal failure by Abe and the LDP, and Abe would lose any legitimacy of leadership, let alone the authority to steer Japan's military towards normalization.

Therefore, it is wise of Abe to focus his argument in justifying the right to self collective defense around the need to protect the lives and survival of the Japanese nation and Japanese citizens. This was particularly clear when Japanese citizens were taken hostage by ISIS in early 2015, as Japan joined the US in its fight against terrorism and security threats upon Japanese nationals became more wide spread.

When Abe first took office as Prime Minister in 2006 he tried to extend the policies of Koizumi and, to some extent, he was more than successful. He upgraded the status of the Defense Agency to a full Ministry of Defense, established the Advisory Panel for Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security and a panel to revise the Fundamental Law of Education. However, Japan's continued economic decline prevented the completion of these initiatives as Abe resigned amid his growing unpopularity. When he returned to the Prime Minister's Office in 2012, Japan's security environment considerably deteriorated, from his vantage point.

Moreover, Abe returned to leadership with more wisdom and valuable lessons drawn from his first term as Prime Minister. He appears now to be fully aware that to lead successfully and to achieve his notable political legacy, he needed to remain in power rather than push too hard and risk being shunned politically. To achieve this, he needs to focus on bringing the Japanese economy back to stability and revive the much needed domestic growth from within, or at least allow the public to see a more "pragmatic" Abe, rather than the conservative, right – wing politician he was known to be during this first term serving as prime minister.

### **2.3.2 Geopolitics and Regional Environment**

Japan's regional economic, political and security presence is also strongly manifest in East Asia (defined here as China, Taiwan, Republic of Korea,

Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the ten ASEAN members). Economically, Japan dominates East Asia, owing to its position as the largest provider of ODA and the complex web of manufacturing production bases, systems, trade and investment placed all over the region in the past half century. ODA was originally offered to the Southeast Asian countries through the guidance and approval of the US.

In terms of political relations, the legacies of World War II and the Cold War have hindered Japan from building the same degree of interdependency with East Asia as in the economic dimension. Japan is still distrusted by many East Asian states and is involved in territorial and resource disputes with China over Senkaku (in Japanese) or Diaoyu (in Chinese) Islands and with Republic of Korea over Takeshima (in Japanese) or Tokdo (in Korean) Islands. At the same time, Japan has carefully crafted special political relationships and partnerships with ASEAN member states, through the ASEAN-Japan forum and Japan – Mekong Summit.

Continued fears of Japanese militarism mean that Japan's military contribution to East Asian security remains largely indirect. Japan contributes through the US – Japan Alliance. Japan's main direct contribution to the region has been made through economic aid to the region and disaster management relief, designed to build political and security stability. Military Security therefore, remains largely the missing link for Japan if it is to create a comprehensive set of international relations in the region.

Over the past decade, Japan has felt increasingly threatened in its regional environment. The greatest threat perception in Japan's view comes from two major sources; China and the DPRK. Therefore, the rapid rise of China and the resulting shift of power in the Asia Pacific region has become the central issue of Japanese foreign and security policy.

The decline of US and the rise of China is as stated, a worrying trend for Japan. China has been achieving impressive economic growth rates for decades and in 2010 it surpassed Japan as the second largest economy in the world. Parallel to its economic rise, China had been investing larger sums in its military, primarily in its navy and air force, a development that causes great unease in Japan. Since 1989 China's defense expenditures have been growing at a rate of more than 10 percent a year (citation). As a result, China's defence budget had seen a 40-fold increase in the past 26 years; in the past 10 years alone, it had quadrupled. The country's official defense budget in 2014 is now three times than that of Japan's. Although Japan's armed forces are technologically superior to China's, this edge is steadily eroding. However, as China's economy faces a slowdown in the same way as Japan is too,

there is a possibility that both countries would need to find other alternatives to deter one another. Another important factor to note is, if China's economy were to stagnate and deteriorate due to many domestic challenges within China, the whole region, as well as Japan, would suffer the effects. Japan is also aware of this fact.

The US, Japan's most important ally, on the other hand, is still suffering the effects of the real estate and financial crisis of 2008. Recovery is on its way, but not fast enough to compete with China's economic progress. However, China's technological advancement is not yet on par with that of the US, and especially not that of Japan's maritime military in the near future.

Although Obama has declared the Asia Pacific region a top foreign policy priority and stated that the US presence there will remain unaffected by cuts in defense spending. But many Japanese are skeptical about the long-term commitment of the US in the region. Budget shortages and instability in the Middle East and the chronic ISIS crisis could force the US to reconsider its focus on Asia. The general assumption in Tokyo is that the US is no longer willing to assume the role of global policeman after the military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. The fact that the U. S government has refrained from intervening militarily in the Ukraine conflict is regarded as evidence of this unwillingness. In the past, the US has repeatedly withdrawn from problems, as a superpower does if the situation doesn't serve US interest.

Some Japanese observers believe the power shift could in the medium to the long term prompt Washington—despite existing differences of opinion and tensions – to opt for a cooperative policy of strategic concessions in dealing with Beijing in order to preserve US global influence. This assessment is paired with concerns that the US could enter into agreements with China that disregard Japan's interests or even run counter to them.

Ambassador Shingo Yamagami, Deputy Director General, Foreign Policy Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan who co-chaired the 12th PM/MM meeting in Tokyo with Mrs. Phantipha Ekaro-hit, Deputy Director General, Department of East Asian Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand also reflected this view.

Apart from the threats from China, Japan is also increasingly concerned with non-traditional threats that transpired national borders, due to technological advancement, and emerging threats such as proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, international terrorism and cyber-attacks.

Japan is concerned by the fragile situation in the Korean Peninsula, historical animosities and the fact that Japan was surrounded by three nuclear

powers (China and Russia, plus DPRK), and all three had standing armies of over one million. The DPRK had already carried out three nuclear tests, as well as missile launches on several occasions, including test firing missiles over Japan into the Pacific Ocean, which Japan considered a direct threat and provocation.

In the East China Sea, acts of provocation continued in sea and air, and tensions continued to loom in the disputed areas. Even after the summit meeting between Abe and Xi Jinping in November 2014, intrusions continued on a daily basis. Although nothing significant was discussed at the summit meeting, at least there was an awareness on both sides that it was crucial for officers on ground to act with utmost self-restraint in order to avoid accidental clashes.

Japan also sees the situation in the South China Sea as a national interest, although somewhat less threatening than the East China Sea. Apart from this being a litmus indicating how ASEAN and regional security frameworks could deal with an assertive China causing tensions in the region. Japan also needed to access the South China Sea as it was now heavily dependent on fuel imports from the Middle east. Maritime freedom and safety of navigation in the South China Sea was therefore a priority for Japan.

But the equation works both ways. The shortest route for China's East Coast to access the South China Sea is via Miyako Islands and then through the Taiwan straits. Abe's insistence to have US troops remain in Okinawa base despite public disapproval is therefore a strategic decision, because the base is situated near Miyako Islands. US military presence in a strategic position is invaluable for Abe's proactive pacifism. Apart from the possibility of a joint patrol with Japan to the stability of sea lanes Japan needs to import crude oil, it would also help prompt China to exercise restraint on alleged provocations in the area. Also, it would keep an eye on any provocations from China upon Taiwan.

Furthermore, the recently revised US- Japan defense cooperation guidelines already mentioned plans by both governments to include cooperation in the area of maritime domain awareness, or the ability based mainly on satellites to monitor maritime activities for the security of remote islands and sea lanes.

Lastly, Japan's economic stagnation is also recognized as a security threat, as it limits Japan's capacity to beef up its military might and therefore its competitive edge and deterrence against China. By relaxing the rule for Japan's military industries to have more options to sell and export military equipment, Abe is also opening windows to expand and stabilize Japan's economic growth as well as garner support from important Japanese investors and political elites.

Japan has high interest in maintaining a strong presence in ASEAN, the Mekong Sub-Region and Thailand because of the potential business opportunities offered in the region, which is fast becoming ASEAN's engine of growth. Japan could not afford to lose any chances to help create new windows of opportunities for its business community. These business groups and conglomerates are not only influential in global and regional business, but are elites that can help extend Abe's political longevity, by supporting Abenomics and again, sustaining Japan's economic growth.

This is why the Japanese government has agreed to push forward Thailand's proposal for a trilateral cooperation scheme to develop the Dawei Special Economic Zone in Myanmar, and a railway project that would link the project along the East-West Economic Corridor, down to Laem Chabang Sea Port in the Eastern Seaboard of Thailand. Japan also agreed to develop a high speed train project from Bangkok to Chiangmai to link with Singapore and Malaysia.

Also, this would help counter-balance Chinese influence in Thailand to some extent. Japan's recent project proposal for a "Partnership for Quality Infrastructure" to inject funding for investment in quality infrastructure projects within ASEAN region of USD 110 billion, announced at the recent 30th ASEAN-Japan Senior Official's Meeting in Phnom Penh on 21-22 June 2015, was intended to counter China's establishment of an Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank earlier this year.<sup>14</sup>

In search of other security options, along with the US - Japan alliance, Japan is concurrently building up its own multi-layered security network. Concretely, Japan is not only strengthening its alliance with Australia but also its Strategic and Global Partnership with India. Moreover, it is also reaching out to NATO concerning security in Asia. In addition, Japan is involved, for example, in ASEAN+1, ASEAN+3, the East Asia Summit and the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). Moreover, Japan is creating various Free Trade Agreements, and carrying out regional capacity building. Regional trade arrangements would be Japan's good bet in enhancing its economic prospects and therefore, Japan has been working hard with the US to have the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) concluded as soon as possible but also under the terms that would not spark controversy among the influential agricultural sectors. Japan has also been voicing very loudly, hopes that ASEAN can

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<sup>14</sup>"Partnership for Quality Infrastructure: Investment for Asia's Future, Japan's circulated document no. 6.5 at the 30th ASEAN – Japan Forum (Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 21-22 June 2015).

accelerate the RCEP, or the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, and facilitate an early conclusion of the free trade arrangement for ASEAN and its ten dialogue partners.

On recent capacity building efforts, Japan has conducted, for example, coast guard training for maritime related officials from different ASEAN countries. Japan also plans to provide patrol vessels to the Philippines and Vietnam, both of whom have been involved in recent maritime conflicts with China.

## **2.4 Reactions in Japan and Abroad**

### **2.4.1 The Japanese Public**

Overall, Abe's efforts to relax Japan's restrictions on the use of military force have been met with resistance and disapproval from its own citizens. Most Japanese feel that the task of the country's armed forces consists of defending Japanese territory in cooperation with the US as well as contributing to disaster relief and UN peace keeping missions. Any further expansion of Japan's military role would be interpreted as provocative and a reminder of Japan's war time aggressions. Protesting in the streets have increased in May 2015 when Abe's administration attempted to have the relevant 11 laws amended by Parliament. He then decided to postpone the Parliament sessions (Diet) to September 2015.

In most recent surveys, more and more oppose the cabinet decision. Over half the population is opposed to exercising the right to self defense in cases of emergency, while only about a third is in favour. To date, most recent polls reflect a record low support for Abe's administration. 80 percent are against the security bills. Criticism is growing and to date, a total of 9766 Japanese scholars, artists and other public intellectuals including Nobel laureate Toshihide Masukawa signed a petition opposing the new security legislation.<sup>15</sup>

Many observers agree that Abe's decision to push for the security bills and make changes to normalize the Japanese military, will indeed be a crucial factor to make or break his own political career.

### **2.4.2 The Nay-Sayers: China and Republic of Korea**

China clearly rejected Japan's ambitions as an exploitation of claims against China's assertiveness, by using this as an excuse to expand Japan's own military capability. China perceived Japan's increased cooperation with other

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<sup>15</sup>Sheila A. Smith, *Asia Unbound: Japan's Diet Uproar*, Council on Foreign Relations blog [Online], 15 July 2015, Available from: <http://blogs.cfr.org/asia/2015/07/15/japans-diet-uproar/#more-17023>.



partners, including the US, as another ploy to systematically contain China. In China's view, Japan had shown no respect for the historical sensitivities that still existed in the region.

Japan's relations with the Republic of Korea have worsened with the current leaders in office of both countries. The distrust has been heightened by Japan's proactive pacifism and the Republic of Korea also has opposed Japan's actions. More recently, Prime Minister Abe has reassured President Park Geun-hye that according to Japan's new security policy, Japan would not take any actions in the Korean Peninsula without first consulting with the Republic of Korea. To some extent, this is part of many attempt (pressured by the US) for both countries to improve their bilateral relations.

#### **2.4.3 The Supporters: US Allies and China's Enemies**

Japan has long been known the region to maintain a reserved posture when it comes to regional security although the US has long been pressuring Japan to step up its contributions since the 1950's. Japan used to argue the necessity to focus on re-building the country from post war damages and sensitivity to regional partners who have suffered from the atrocities and war crimes committed by Japan. The US however, has also not been able to step up or maintain a strong presence in the Asia-Pacific region at that time. During the cold war, it was Russia and the US against each other in every region of the world. US was preoccupied thereafter with the Middle East crises and other new, non-traditional security threats. All these factors have forced the US to shift focus to address other complexities and priorities elsewhere.

Obama is well aware of US limitations to fully commit to its rebalancing policy towards Asia. US has been implying to Japan to stop being free-riders and finally take up a more active role. Australia also welcomes that another ally has stepped up to share the burden, as it has long been taking care of US interests in the lower part of the Pacific Ocean. Therefore, on the US alliance side, Japan's new found assertiveness is welcomed. However, this is in part because the current Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott is more a conservative nationalist than his opposition and predecessor Kevin Rudd, who is himself a Chinese expert and sympathizer. Abbott's Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, however, recognizes well the importance of balancing major players in the region to maintain Australia's national interest, which in large depends on trade and economic ties with China. Bishop herself is not in good terms with Abbott. If Australia's administration witnesses change in leadership or its foreign minister is replaced with a minister less pro China,

Australia might not be an ideal ally that Japan could rely on completely when it comes to the China dilemma.

ASEAN countries such as the Philippines and Vietnam who have territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea appear to support Abe's proactive pacifism. In fact, the only country that appears to be truly supportive is the Philippines. Japan, which has lifted its ban on armaments exports, is helping the Philippines to boost its maritime forces and its official development assistance to the Philippines were largely used militarily. Other countries that stake claim, like Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and especially Vietnam have been more careful and cautious in their responses. Japan, however, claims that all these countries have already confirmed full support to its new security policy.

The author had talked to several diplomats and as well as academicians of Vietnam, Singapore and Malaysia. All denied having issued any official statements specifically supporting the Japan's proactive contribution to peace and the Self Defense Forces right to collective self-defense. Vietnam has even dispatched diplomats to seek out responses and positions from other ASEAN members on two separate occasions. First, in 2014, on the Japanese cabinet decision to reinterpret Article 9 of the Japanese constitution and second, more recently when US - Japan Defense Alliance was modified in late April 2015.

#### **2.4.4 The Wary Worriers: Thailand and ASEAN**

In reality, the majority of ASEAN member countries (Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia Cambodia, Myanmar) responses are more or less similar. They support Japan's active role for security in the region in principle, but do not want this to be the cause for rise of tension in the region, as China and the Republic of Korea have strongly opposed Japan's proactive pacifism, arousing nationalist sentiment stemmed from historical baggage and resentment that have not yet found closure.

Japan in response, has stepped up efforts to persuade Thailand and ASEAN members to confirm their support as a group. At the 30th ASEAN-Japan Senior Officials Meeting in Phnom Penh on 20-21 June 2015, Japan again lobbied for ASEAN support for its proactive contribution to peace role in the region and issue a statement to confirm this. In the process, Japan is courting ASEAN countries to ward off Chinese influence and counter balance China's power in the region.

Japan also asked Mekong countries to endorse a leaders' statement at the Mekong-Japan Summit in Tokyo 4-5 July 2015, entitled "Tokyo Strategy 2015," to include Mekong countries' support for Japan's role as proactive contributor to

peace in the region.<sup>16</sup> Also, at their bilateral meeting on 4th July 2015, Prime Minister Abe asked Prime Minister Prayut to confirm his support for Japan's proactive contribution to peace. And again, Prime Minister Prayut repeated Thailand's formal position: Thailand already supported the principle, and would be ready to cooperate with Japan in this regard. This including for instance, conducting joint military exercises, combating transnational crimes and terrorism, as well as cooperation in disaster management. He added that regional security was a shared concern for all countries in the region, not just only Japan's or Thailand's. All countries needed to contribute in accordance with their capability. He was implying that in taking action to maintain peace and security in the region, Japan needed to consult all parties in the region, as the problems necessitated joint efforts rather than unilateral actions.<sup>17</sup>

Ideally, it would help lessen tension if Japan did heed concerns raised by partners in the region, instead of focusing only on explaining Japan's intentions. Being more sensitive to other countries' concerns could only help Japan understand the mindsets of regional partners, and offer an opportunity to address and clarify any misperceptions and specific concerns.

Japan also should reflect that their interests to have a more proactive role in maintaining peace would overlap with the region's interests, and that all shared the same goal to create a stable and peaceful environment inductive for economic growth and dynamism. This is to serve the interest of the region, not any unilateral side, not the US, nor Japan alone. Japan also has to show that it intends to maintain peaceful co-existence and nurture a relationship with China that is constructive and able to yield mutual benefits. Japan's expression of remorse for war crimes, although repetitive and embarrassing for the Japanese public, must be repeated. Germany underwent decades of self-criticism but only received praise for its strong will and sincerity to bring peace and prosperity to its region, as well as confirm that it would never again repeat the same mistakes.

For Japan and especially Abe's Japan, this is highly unlikely. At the 12th PM/MM session in Tokyo, when the Thai delegation was pressured to confirm support for Japan's Cabinet decision to reinterpret the Constitution, Thailand requested that the Japanese side first clarified (1) how it would decide that diplomatic channels did not work and military solutions must be pursued to resolve

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<sup>16</sup>Department of International Economic Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Telex No. 0704/605/2558](#), 8 July 2015, Report on the 7<sup>th</sup> Mekong-Japan Summit.

<sup>17</sup>Department of East Asian Affairs, [Telex No. 1305/611/2558](#), 9 July 2015, Record of Discussions between Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, 4<sup>th</sup> July 2015.

problems; (2) how it would alleviate concerns that some countries and also the Japanese public may have that Japan could become involved in unjust wars (through misinformation or miscalculation, such as in the case of justifications behind the US invasion Iraq); and (3) explain the reactions of the Japanese public on the Cabinet's decision to reinterpret the constitution. Justification for these questions was that it resonated and represented concerns of many others in the region.

Ambassador Yamagami's clarifications offered only vague explanations. He reiterated that Article 9 of the Constitution prohibited use of force in settling international disputes. The right to collective self-defense was also restrained by very specific limitations. Looking back on Japan's track record over the past 70 years, Japan had been very cautious. Japanese troops had only taken part in UN peace keeping missions. Moreover, Prime Minister Abe had made clear that Japan would not engage in combat in Iraq or Afghanistan, and that any use of force would be the minimum amount necessary. Regarding misinformation, this was applicable to any country, which meant that Japan just had to carefully check its intelligence. Which of course, offered no concrete assurance.

Although the Japanese public response appeared negative and mixed at this time, Ambassador Yamagami believed that eventually the public would support the government's propositions as this was the Japanese public's usual response; first resistance, then gradual acceptance. He was confident the public would eventually understand the necessity for Japan to formulate new security paradigm in response to recent changes and security threats.<sup>18</sup>

Regardless of the formalities and niceties, such responses do not ease Thailand's concerns, but rather, sends out a rather worrying message that Japan's government officials did not take Thailand's concerns seriously. It reflects Japan's attitude towards Thailand as a partner of no equal footing.

## 2.5 Conclusions

In the years since World War II, Japanese society has adhered to the spirit of Article 9 of the postwar Constitution, which renounces war as a means of settling international disputes. Against the background of the July 2014 cabinet decision affirming Japan's right to participate in collective self-defense, the Japanese public seems to view the Abe cabinet's legislative initiative as portending a major shift in

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<sup>18</sup>Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, [Memo No. 1305/703/2558](#), April 1, 2015, 12<sup>th</sup> Thailand-Japan PM/MM Report, Department of East Asian Affairs.

Japan's basic security posture. This perception—no doubt exacerbated by the difficulty of conveying the larger security picture in terms lay people can easily grasp—has given rise to a significant backlash in Japan and abroad.

Japanese officials argue that the change in Japan's security paradigm is long overdue, given the need for Japan to adapt to the dramatic changes in the security environment. The current legal framework was developed to address the security challenges of the Cold War era—from the 1950s through the 1980s. Although some modifications to Japan's security statutes over the past quarter century have been introduced throughout that period, but these are limited and tightly circumscribed in nature.

Concerns about the Abe cabinet's legislative initiative within Japan are understandable. Japan has managed to maintain its security under existing laws and the previous interpretation of the Constitution. Furthermore, the outcries from Japan's neighbours have resonated alarms within Japan, where the majority of the public have always been sensitive to its past war sins. The perception is Abe's proactive contribution to peace is a step back into the past, far away from the Fukuda doctrine which was introduced as an assurance to ASEAN members who had suffered under Japan's war time aggressions.<sup>19</sup> This is why Abe's administration has been working hard to assure neighbours that Japan's current security initiatives are in fact for the good of the region, especially with an assertive China flexing muscles in the South China Sea. Japan is even offering its services in tandem with the US, and to protect safety and freedom of navigation as well as over flight in the South China Sea, which is a common concern for all states in the region, especially Japan and China.

Japan is heavily dependent on imports of crude oil, even more so now that nuclear reactors are unable to restart since the Fukushima incident. In fact, the oil transported through the Malacca Strait from the Indian Ocean, en route to East Asia through the South China Sea, is triple the amount that transits the Panama Canal. Roughly two thirds of ROK's energy supplies, nearly 60 percent of Japan's and Taiwan's energy supplies and 80 percent of China's crude oil imports come through

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<sup>19</sup>The Fukuda doctrine emphasized three pillars as the foundation for the ASEAN-Japan relationship: (1) Japan rejects the role of a military power; (2) Japan will build a relationship of mutual confidence based on "heart-to-heart" understanding between Japan and Southeast Asia, and (3) Japan will cooperate from the perspective of an equal partner

the South China Sea. Whereas in the Persian Gulf only energy is transported, in the South China Sea, there are energy, finished goods and unfinished goods.<sup>20</sup>

The crucial point here is that the new legislation does not imply Japan's commitment to an "exclusively defensive defense" in keeping with Article 9. The Komeito, the LDP's coalition partner, was particularly insistent on this point. Japan is subject to tighter legal constraints on the use of force than any other country in the world, and it will remain so after enactment of the new legislation. However, it does imply a change in the status quo, in a time of power transition, as China is rising while the US is in decline, which causes instability or disequilibrium of power as stipulated by the power of balance theory.

To reassure the public in Japan and its neighbors, the Japanese government needs to make Diet deliberations of the legislation as thorough and transparent as possible, and help the Japanese people and the international community understand the bills and why they are necessary.

In addition to ensuring the transparency of the legislative process, the government should use diplomacy and public communication to impress on neighbors of Japan's enduring commitment to peace, making the most of such opportunities as the prime minister's planned statement commemorating the seventieth anniversary of the end of World War II this coming September 2015. But what is mostly needed is a responsible and constructive Diet discussion to demonstrate that the government's defense bills are designed for no other purpose than to contribute to the security and stability of Japan and the East Asian region.

It has been a year since the Cabinet's decision to reinterpret the Constitution. The government has introduced a package of security bills to implement the change of interpretation. It must be stressed that in reality, Abe's administration was only seeking to clarify the legal basis for military operations that would address scenarios that Japan has indeed already confronted.

The security bills are still being debated and pushed hard by the ruling party and its coalition for approval at both lower and upper houses. Despite the two thirds majority of seats that the LDP and Komeito already hold in both houses, the debate has been fierce and opposition severe both outside and inside parliament. Most of the opposition lawmakers walked out of the lower house chamber in protest before

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<sup>20</sup>Robert D. Kaplan, [Asia's Cauldron: The South China Sea and the End of a Stable Pacific](#) (New York: Random House, 2014).

the vote took place on 16 July 2015, with only members of the small Japan Restoration Party voting against the bills.

Government approval rating has been sinking and is now at record low since Abe's reelection in December 2014. According to a poll taken on 6 July 2015 by the Mainichi Shimbun Newspaper, the number of those disapproving Abe's government is now at 43 percent, surpassing those who approve of Abe (42 percent) for the first time.<sup>21</sup> This should be a blow to the LDP who has prided itself over high public approval rate and holds a majority of seats in the parliament. In other polls the disapproval rate is as high as 45.85 percent, and the number of people disapproving of the security bills themselves are as high as 80 percent.<sup>22</sup>

The upper house, where the LDP and partners also hold a majority, now has 60 days to rule on the bills. Even if it rejects them, the bills would be sent back to the lower house which can then pass them into law. This rule could be applied to the security legislation on or after 14 September 2015. It is predicted that despite all protests, Abe will be expected to stay his course, as his grandfather before him did, when his efforts to revise the US-Japan security treaty were met with resistance too. However, the circumstances and regional landscape that Abe is facing is far more complex than half a century ago. The nationalist card played back in the 1950s would be better contained and managed than today. Against China, Japan was the superior, not the inferior nation. The DPRK was more predictable and manageable. And there was no fight against terrorism leading to the hostage crisis by ISIS like earlier this year. The US was not in decline and a possible liability to Japan. Kishi's situation is incomparable to Abe's.

All these factors combined make it empirical for Abe to decide to push forward with his security reform policies. However, the Japanese public appear to be convinced that their best bet is the US Japan alliance coupled with Japan's own military self-restraint. While Tokyo continues to expand its military cooperation with neighbours in the region, the public remains deeply skeptical and wary about expanding the role of Japan's own self defense forces overseas.

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<sup>21</sup>Iwama Yoko, Anomaly of Japan's Constitutional Debate about Security Policy, Editor's Blog, Discuss Japan Japan Foreign Policy Forum [Online], July 2015, Available from: <http://blogs.cfr.org/asia/2015/07/15/japans-diet-uproar/#more-17023>.

<sup>22</sup>Sheila A. Smith, Asia Unbound: Japan's Diet Uproar, Council on Foreign Relations blog [Online], 15 July 2015, Available from: <http://blogs.cfr.org/asia/2015/07/15/japans-diet-uproar/#more-17023>.

Before the end of September 2015, this will test how much Abe's determination on the security bill will hurt the party. And if Abe and his conservative political legacy will in fact stand the test of time and public protest. It will be hard for Abe to step back from his pursuit to reform security policies, as this was a necessary element to secure a stronger US-Japan defense alliance which he had recently promised with the Obama administration earlier this year. Abe is up for elections for the leadership of the LDP on 20 September 2015, and as long as he is still fighting for the cause of the nationalists' faction, it can be predicted that no other candidate will challenge his claim to remain party leader until the end of his term as Japan's prime minister. However, the rest of Abe's premiership does appear to be a bit rocky.



## Chapter 3

### Findings

This Chapter will explore possible scenarios predicting the behaviour of Japan and major regional players as Japan continues on its path towards normalizing its military and allowing Japanese Self Defense Forces to exercise the right to collective self-defense. The scenarios will be conceptualized by realism and balance of power theory. Evidence supporting the statements/scenarios have been introduced in the literature review in Chapter 2.

#### 3.1 Setting the Scene

The current broad trajectory of the region will likely continue: Asia's rise to economic supremacy means a power transition from the western to eastern world. Economic and maritime power will continue to shift towards East Asia, making it difficult for a declining US to accept and allow. China is even posed to overtake the US as the largest economy fairly soon. According to realists, this means a change in the status quo and consequently conflict and resistance to follow from the major players involved in the power play. This includes the world's three more economically powerful states; the US, China and Japan.

The population of the region will also continue to grow; energy and food security will become even greater concerns; demand for offshore oil and gas will continue to drive maritime sovereignty disputes; trade within the region and between it and the rest of the world will continue to expand. Economic regionalism (TPP versus RCEP, AIIB versus ADB, AMF versus IMF, expansion of the Chinese Renminbi as another international currency option, the possibility of establishing the FTAAP, etc.) will continue to be important tools for the major power oppositions to use against each other. Traditional security concerns will remain the principal cause of instability in the region.

Based on realism and balance of power theories, it can be assumed that Japan will have to address the political and economic deficits that it is currently facing in order to regain and shift power from China. Japan's stagnating economy is in the author's view, the most important security challenge that Abe strives to tackle. Threat perceptions stemming from a rising China, a declining US as a stabilising

security assurance, an unpredictable and nuclear-armed DPRK, increasing non – traditional threats that are also transnational in nature and wide spread in severity due to technological advancement, are all real and true security concerns in Japan’s eyes as well.

### **3.1.1 Domestic Key Features**

Furthermore, the unique, domestic characteristics in Japan must also be factored in. Japan’s domestic political system and electoral system is complicated and highly influenced by the largest nationalist elite group, the Nippon Izokukai, who also has the support of the largest business organization in Japan, the Keidanren.

Abe is to date among one of Japan’s strongest leaders who is likely to stay in power for another three years. Abe’s desire to pursue a political legacy runs deep at a personal level. He is therefore more firm and unlikely to stray from this ambition. Abe is also supportive of a nationalist, left – wing faction. He seeks to break free from dependence on US security assurances and regain Japan’s glory and honour as a country with a normalized military able and equipped to protect itself from a more assertive China. Abe’s ambitions runs deep from a personal sense of national pride and legacy to bring Japan out of its shame and humiliation functioning on a constitution that has limited Japan from being a normal, independent nation since World War II.

Abe’s actions have opened Pandora’s box and angered the Japanese public. The risk factor is that criticisms against Abe’s administration will be getting worse. On 4 June 2015, a constitutional scholar called on by the LDP to testify on the constitutionality of the government’s decision to reinterpret the constitution did in fact testify that Cabinet decision in 2014 was indeed unconstitutional. This caused an uproar and many more chains of protests. Local assemblies passed resolutions in protest to the Abe Cabinet, continuing on-going criticisms and possibly a nationwide protest against the LDP and Abe. This would be a huge political step back for Abe.

### **3.1.2 The Competing Japan and China Factor**

China and Japan will continue to compete for energy, economic, and maritime power which is likely to trigger tensions and extensions of wariness around the region, especially as China increases its military capability. Japan and China will continue to compete in winning alliances in the region, as a means to tilt the balance of power in their favour.

The US would also join hands with Japan to work against or contain China, as the US perceives a rising China to be change in the status quo. The US will

monitor and control allies in the region closely so as to maintain its power in the region. It will together with Japan, seek to strengthen alliances and cooperation with members of ASEAN, using military or strategic partnerships with middle powers such as India, Australia and New Zealand, to neutralize China's influence in the region. Additionally, as the US and Japan continue to paint China as assertive and untrustworthy, nationalistic resentments could deepen. There is a risk that resentments on both sides could spiral out of control.

Japan will increase its foothold in Thailand and the Mekong Sub-Region for two major reasons; conquering a strategically important location in the region to contain China and securing business and investment opportunities in a highly dynamic market for its business sector.

Japan and China will also continue to compete for increased military cooperation with the countries in the Mekong Sub-Region. Ironically, pursuing more cooperation will instead trigger more distrust because of the tendency of an arms race. However, for military equipment and weapons manufacturers such as Japan and China, more tension in the region means better business for the military industry. But, this will not be the case if an arms race consequently raises the risk of unintended incidents or miscalculations, and certainly not if accidental clashes escalate into war. In this sense, the competition between Japan and China to gain alliances from members of ASEAN will eventually work as a divide and rule mechanism and weaken ASEAN's ability to unite and tackle regional concerns collectively as one single community.

### **3.1.3 Flashpoints in the East China Sea and South China Sea**

As competition and conflict intensify against a backdrop of military buildup, arms race and increased military activities, the danger of flashpoints flaring up will also increase. East Asia's geopolitical security agenda already includes a volatile mixture of Islamist extremism, nationalism, historical baggage from past wars, territorial disputes, and an array of transnational threats and non-traditional security issues. Territorial disputes in the East China and South China seas, specifically between China and Japan and China with some ASEAN members, are in danger of flaring up. Asia is already home to eight of the world's largest militaries and it contains four dangerous flashpoints: the Taiwan Strait, the Korean Peninsula, Kashmir, and Pakistan-Afghanistan. It certainly does not need more security competition and potential for armed conflicts.

From the realist point of view, both China and Japan would seek ways to weaken their opponent and gain advantage. Hence, claimants to the

territorial disputes in the South China Sea continue to engage in land reclamation activities, particularly China exceedingly more than others. Therefore, the risk for armed conflicts runs even higher. Additionally, China's perception towards Japan's new security policy is one of a threat to China's own security.

As China continues to increase its presence in disputed territories in the South China Sea despite warnings from other claimant states, Japan and the US could be tempted to use the newly revised US-Japan Security Defense Alliance as an excuse to enter the South China Sea, conducting its right to collective-self defense, also as a deterrence. The question is, to which extent would the US and Japan consult ASEAN before engaging in any concrete actions. And in doing so, there would be considerable risks. China would perceive such acts to be a direct aggression to China's sovereignty, as it is an attack against China's "core interest." This is a dangerous scenario that risks the occurrence of a full-blown military conflict. There is a possibility that Japan's Abe could be ambitious enough to want to use grounds on the South China Sea as a test to gauge China's maritime capability, as a measure of deterrence, before China comes too close and approaches Japan on the East China Sea.

Furthermore, China has been advancing its military hardware and technology at a rapid pace, but is known to have a less-experienced military fleet. Incidents in the past (who have in the past already caused such unintended incidents on ground). The continued military technological advancement in China could become a high risk factor for more undesired arm conflict on ground.

This is why the author believes that behind the scenes, Japan and China have purposely been working hard to make great strides in building up to the anticipated summit meeting in September 2015, during Abe's scheduled visit to China. This is an indicator that both Japan and China are fully aware that escalation of nationalist sentiments blown out of proportion does not serve any useful purpose for both sides. Especially as both Japan and China are still facing serious limitations stemming from domestic economic problems and stagnation. Both need a stable regional environment for their businesses to expand regionally and globally and fix these economic ailments. However, in doing so, it is inevitable for Japan and China to compete for the same resources, production and supply chains, as well as markets, especially in the CLMV, as well as Thailand.

It would appear to be beneficial for both sides to manage their power play, and agree on safety precautions to prevent miscalculations and

undesired mishaps. At the end of the day, keeping the power play balanced and under control, is a mutual interest.

As both countries commemorate the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II in September 2015 as well, expectations for either countries to act one way are high (Japan apologetic, China refraining from shaming and blaming Japanese war dead). Given the pretext of recent Japanese and Chinese aggressions, the sensitive nature and timing of the event, Abe's and Xi Jinping's statements will be closely followed, word by word. This is why this year's commemorative events on the end of World War II is all the more meaningful. Any slight misinterpretations could trigger nationalistic sentiments on either side, causing unwanted conflict that could also spin out of control.

Therefore, is safe to assume that both China and Japan are fully aware of the significance of the summit, and that both leaders would unmistakably try their best not to avoid causing controversies that could spiral out of control. Although the meeting itself would not be warm, as long as neither side has caused any public embarrassments before the summit, the two leaders will save one another's faces and keep the meeting at a "contained" cordial atmosphere.

### **3.2 What will Japan do next?**

With escalating protests against him, the pragmatic Abe will see that despite his personal ambitions to push forward the family's political legacy to restore Japan's "normal" status with a normal army, the more immediate task at hand would be, to have the public again on his side supporting economic reforms he had promised to deliver. Restoring public faith in his leadership and reviving the economy would have to be his key priorities.

Abe would certainly not abandon his ambitions to reform security policies, but it can be assumed that he would do this through as offer approach and use coercion rather than force to obtain legislative approval. It is also foreseeable that Abe will continue to persuade ASEAN member countries and partners in the region, to voice their support and call for Japan to play the role of a proactive contributor to peace for the region.

Japan will work towards strengthening alliances in the region to undermine China's influence through not only "strategic partnerships" to gain access for a more favourable investment environment but also for increased military cooperation, joint military exercises as well as weapon and military equipment sales. This will

contribute to reinvigorating Japan's economy, help fund its military spending, as well as contain China's influence in the region.

Japan will seek to accelerate the conclusion of ongoing regional economic arrangement negotiations with key partners, i.e., with the UN on the TPP, with Thailand and ASEAN members on RCEP, with APEC members the FTAAP, and eventually even the trilateral free trade agreement with China and ROK. Japan will also work with governments in the Mekong Sub-region to ensure that its investors can expand investment under a favourable business environment, offering packages to export high quality infrastructure projects in the Mekong Sub-region. Abe needs to capitalize all he can from such regional agreements in order to keep his domestic political allies supportive of his leadership.

Securing economic opportunities will keep not only his political supporters, the Keidanren happy, it will help them support his Abenomics reform, on which Abe has yet to deliver as promised. The last "arrow" of the three Abenomics reform, involves many much need but controversial reforms that even his predecessor Junichiro Koizumi avoided doing. These include: freeing up an overly restrictive health-care sector, facilitating local and foreign entrepreneurs so as to encourage more investment in Japan, overhauling corporate governance, welcoming more foreign workers and women into Japanese work force to solve the aging society problem, opening up the agricultural sector, deregulating and reducing barriers to trade to facilitate free trade agreements such as the TPP, and other thorny issues of raising income tax.<sup>23</sup> All these reforms, although much needed, if not handled carefully, can hurt the government's approval rating further.

Although the relationship between Japan and ROK have been at its worst during Abe's tenure, the Japanese government will continue to work harder on securing relations with ROK to calm tensions down and bring ROK on board. This is partly because of the pressure from the US for Japan to work with ROK and form a bloc against China, and also partly because ROK has been enjoying closer relations with China rather than Japan.

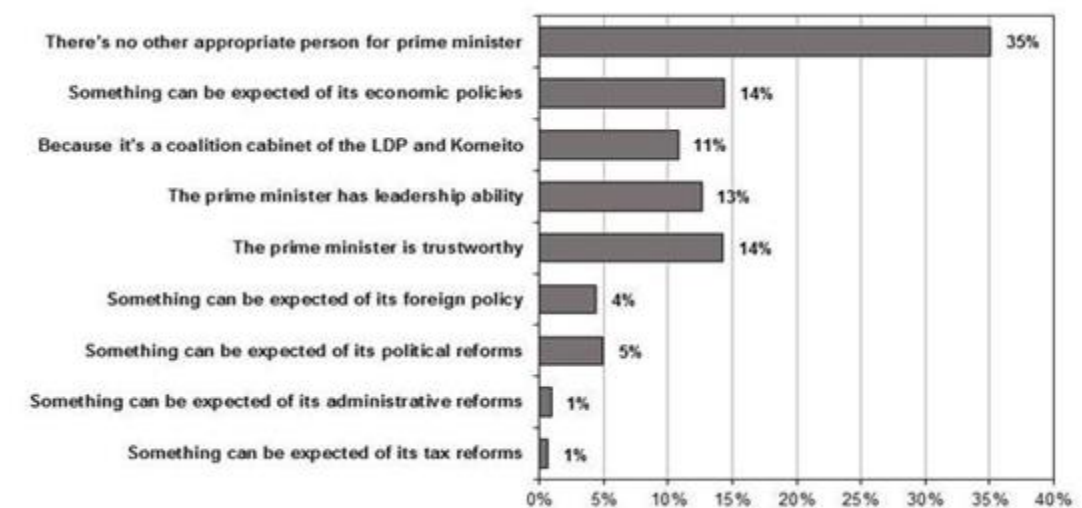
Australia's alliance with Japan will continue to be that of an increasingly strategic importance. Japan will strengthen its military partnership and cooperation, utilizing the advantage of Tony Abbott who has a less favourable position towards China.

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<sup>23</sup>"The Third Arrow, [The Economist](#), 28 June 2015.

However, Japan needs to be aware that Australia also plays a strong power balancing game. Australia makes a smart distinction of separating economic priorities with China, while maintaining political and strategic alliances with US and Japan. Australia's Foreign Minister Julie Bishop helps Australia maintain good relations with China in order to keep its economic engine running smoothly. Therefore, whether Australia will be able to make clear distinctions between military and economic cooperation with China, depends largely on how Australia's Foreign Minister Julie Bishop will manage to balance her foreign policy with Abbott. Abbott and Abe appear to be on the same page when it comes to the China question, and there is a high possibility that both leaders will push to cement the security ties they have fostered before they leave office, as part of their legacy. If so, we can assume that there will be more deals to intensify military joint exercises, joint operations and increase cooperation in military technology. And this alliance could appear to be a promising stabilising factor for Japan.

According to a recent poll by the Nikkei, the Japanese public will still be inclined to vote for Abe for two main reasons; firstly, there is no other candidate more appropriate, and secondly, they still anticipate results from his economic reform. There is no indication of public anticipation for any changes in security policies. Chart I below, illustrates the public perception towards Abe.



**Chart I** Why Does the Japanese Public Vote for Abe?

Source: Nikkei Research; Chart by Paul J. Saclise

The general support for Abe is greatly attributed to the fact that public perception towards the opposition party is still rather negative. The DPJ has for the time being, no candidate strong enough to step up and compete with Abe. Abe has obtained the majority of seats at both lower and upper houses of the parliament. Compared to his predecessors, Cabinet support for Abe and the LDP still remains high, despite the recent backlash in parliament from the security bills controversy. Chart II illustrates Cabinet support for Abe and the LDP, compared with the DPJ, after 31 months in office.

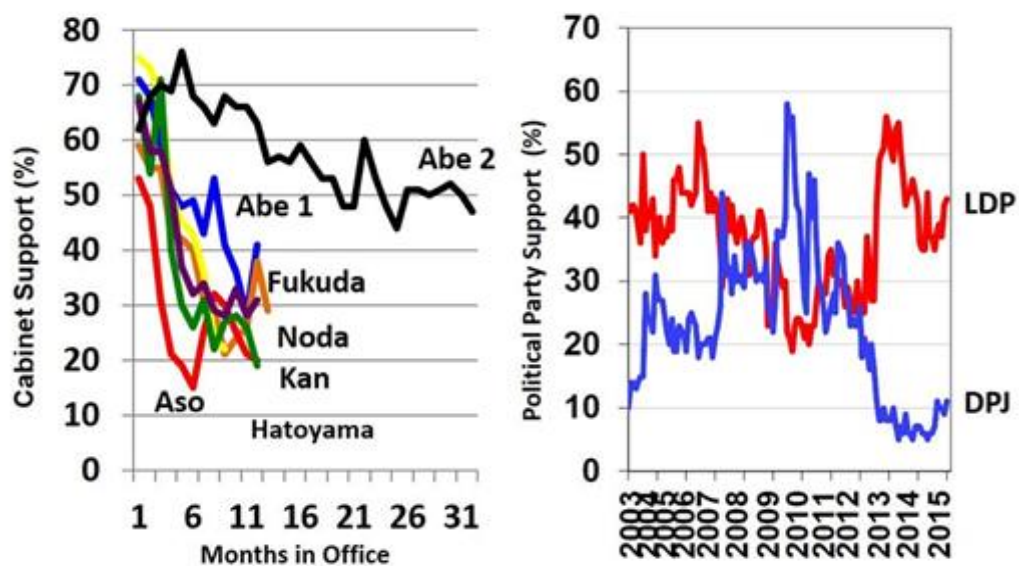


Chart II Japan's Abe Cabinet and LDP in Context

Source: Nikkei Research; chart by Paul J. Scalise

Considering this favourable political setting, the most probable decision that Abe will make, is to continue to campaign on the necessity of his security reforms to secure wider support from both the domestic public and partners in the region. The problem with this scenario is, he might need to do this by inciting more fear and nervousness into the general public about dangers of China's assertiveness, DPRK's threats and injecting other threat perceptions into Japan's mainstream public.

Chart III explains the scenario to Abe's process towards his ultimate goal of normalizing the Japanese military, where necessary legalization procedures have been approved and completed.





Chart III Key Factors and Possible Scenarios in Abe's Mission to Normalise the Japanese Military

The following legend explains the symbols depicted in Chart III

Symbol	Definition
Red	= external factors and critical uncertainties that Japan has little control over, but can affect the region and Abe's decision-making
Dark Blue	= key factors that affect Abe's ultimate goal
Purple	= indicators for future change, which Abe has partial control
Orange	= negative and positive logics leading towards possible scenarios
Green	= options Abe would take to avoid undesired scenarios
Light Blue	= possible scenarios that could unfold
————	= most likely to happen
- - - -	= likely to happen
- - - - -	= less likely to happen
- - - - - -	= unlikely to happen
.....	= highly unlikely to happen
↔	= indication of cause and effect or a relation between the factors

### 3.3 Future Scenarios

If by September 2015 the Diet successfully approves the security bills, there would be further uproar from countries in the region, triggering more resistance and hostility from the Japanese public. Already, the Chinese Ambassador in Tokyo has called this “rubbing salt into wounds” of those who suffered in the war. Nonetheless, Abe will most likely continue to push through with the security bills, despite the risk of further backlash. There is currently no worthy opponent from the DPJ to contest Abe's leadership and the political situation suggests that if Abe backs down, he will lose precious momentum. Plus, if the Japanese economy picks up, it will significantly calm down public protests against Abe's security reforms.

There is a pessimistic scenario where China will respond to this as an act of American primacy with Japan as its proxy. It will be a period of competing strategic concepts with China continuing to develop denial access capabilities while the United States focuses on offensively-oriented concepts to assert access. However, China with its growing military power and advantage of geographical proximity is unlikely to be intimidated by aggressive American military responses. These only add to the security dilemma for both Washington and Beijing. The most dangerous scenario could be Japan and the US using China's assertiveness and recent

developments in the South China Sea as an excuse to confront China militarily, or other flashpoints, either by intention or by accident.

The pessimistic scenario will be a difficult time for countries in the region. They will tend to fall within either an American/Japanese or Chinese “camp.” Regional defence spending will increase significantly. Overall, the regional maritime environment will become increasingly anarchic and beyond the ability of existing regional institutions to control. There will be increased risks of a naval arms race; incidents at sea will increase; and measures to manage them will be ineffective. Sovereignty disputes will not be resolved with a marked lack of maritime cooperation to provide good order at sea and obstacles to freedom and safety of commercial navigation.

Most importantly, if any armed conflict were to occur along the flashpoints in the region, this will damage the economic dynamism that the region has enjoyed so far, and add on the risk of regional economic stagnation that is harmful to both Japan and China at time when both economies dramatically need options to support an economic infrastructure overhaul.

Should Abe choose to abort his mission or temporarily postpone security policy reform, although the likelihood of such a scenario is very low, Abe would probably buy time to further instill nationalistic resentments against China and increase threat perceptions among the public, so that they will be persuaded to accept the justification and necessity of a normalized military. There is also the possibility of the Japanese public’s resistance against Abe’s propaganda. This relies heavily on China’s behaviour, efforts to restore relations with Japan in the next few months, and the Japanese public’s perception on China’s sincerity.

From a realist’s point of view, it is only natural that as China continues to become more powerful economically and politically, it will also seek avenues to accommodate and secure its continued growth. It is inevitable that such actions will be perceived as assertive when interests overlap and clash with other players over the same limited resources. China will need to set its own rules which may or may not be in line with international norms, for the sake of ensuring that its own development progresses according to its planned national strategy. How future scenarios pan out will depend largely on how well the US and Japan can find room to accommodate this reality, and China’s place among the industrialised nations.

An analysis on China’s perceptions towards Japan’s behaviour and the Chinese dilemma to normalize relations with Japan under Abe’s administration alone is a worthy topic to further explore in another study

## Chapter 4

### Discussions and Conclusions

#### 4.1 Implications for Thailand

Japan's efforts to increase its defense posture in the region indicate that the traditional thinking of the one single rivalry between the US and China as the overarching factor determining the geopolitics in the region is over-simplistic. Japan's own competition with China to win over countries in the region especially Thailand is a game that deals directly with Japan's own interests, and not the US – China relationship. If anything, it is a direct response to how the US appears to be less reliable to Japan and seemingly more accommodating towards China. Both the US and China are increasingly aware of the fact that a zero sum game in contemporary international politics and power play is beneficial to none. Rather, it is an adjustment to the transition of China into international politics as another superpower, in accordance with the realist way of thinking that can actually yield more benefits.

Abe's security policy reform is also a part of Japan's contemporary regional diplomacy which attaches priority to Southeast Asia and a significant elevation of Thai-Japan relations. Japan's Abe looked towards Thailand with more enthusiasm compared to his predecessors. His visit to Thailand in January 2013 was his first official overseas trip in his second premiership. This was a stark contrast to his first tenure as prime minister in 2006-2007, in which his first overseas trip was to Beijing.<sup>24</sup> It was also the first official visit paid by a Japanese Prime Minister to Thailand in eleven years.<sup>25</sup> At that time, Barack Obama, US President, and Wen Jiabao, out-going Premier of the People's Republic of China, were both visiting Thailand--just one day apart from each other. Having leaders from three major powers visiting Thailand at the same time raised the strategic profile of Thailand significantly.

Abe was also the first Japanese prime minister to visit all ten ASEAN member countries within the first year of his new premiership in 2013. By 2012, when the incident involving Tokyo's purchase of three Islands in the East China Sea

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<sup>24</sup>IISS, "Japan and its Regional Relations: Making Common Cause." *Asia-Pacific Regional Security Assessment 2015: An IISS Strategic Dossier* (United Kingdom: Arundel House, May 2015).

<sup>25</sup> Prime ministers Taro Aso and Yukio Hatoyama both visited Thailand in 2009 but only to attend ASEAN sessions, not as a bilateral or official visit per se

resulted in public riots against Japanese businesses in China, Japan had shifted much of its investment over to Southeast Asia and overtook the European Union to become the largest investor that region. At the heart of these actions, as noted earlier, was the fear for China becoming a regional hegemon, replacing Japan in the region, as well as taking over potential economic and strategic interests.

Japan's threat perception on China's dominance in the region is so great that despite being the champion of democracy that it is, Japan was able to turn a blind eye on the political change in Thailand last year. When the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) first took control of the country in May 2014, Tokyo's first reaction was a strong message of disappointment followed by a cold shoulder, shutting down official contact with Bangkok. However, a few months later, Tokyo made a swift change when the NCPO placed General Prayut Chan-o-cha as Prime Minister in September 2014. In early October 2014, Tokyo decided to dispatch Abe's special envoy, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Minoru Kiuchi to Bangkok to renew Tokyo's recognition of its partnership with Bangkok, and invite the newly appointed Thai Prime Minister to Tokyo as soon as possible.

It was the Japanese investors in Thailand who alerted their Government that by shunning Thailand, Japan would lose its place in this strategically important location of Southeast Asia and that China had already begun its opportunist plot to replace Japan.

Later on, this information would be confirmed to the author by Tadashi Maeda,<sup>26</sup> Senior Managing Director of JBIC (Japan Bank for International Cooperation), while accompanying Thai Deputy Foreign Minister Don Pramudvinai in Toykoat a working lunch, on the sidelines of Prime Minister Prayut's official visit to Japan in February 2015. Maeda also disclosed that Japan's Embassy in Bangkok had prepared a strategy paper on how to weaken Chinese influence in Thailand. In fact, the idea had been presented to the Japanese Government at the highest level and it was this fear of China that had turned things around, coupled with the persuasive investors in

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<sup>26</sup>Maeda has the ears of some prominent Japanese cabinet members because his position in JBIC requires him to make risk assessments and recommendations to the Japanese Government on its investment plans in the region. He is also deeply involved in the trilateral cooperation between the Governments of Thailand, Myanmar and Japan on development of Dawei Special Economic Zone in Myanmar. Dawei Special Economic Zone will be Japan's largest investment in the region ever. All three governments are poised to work together on this project as they recently penned a Memorandum of Intention (MOI) pledging cooperation and commitments to the project in July 2015

Thailand and Keidanren, who did not want to risk losing their investments in Thailand from a diplomatic blunder by the Japanese Government.

Thailand is strategically important for both China and Japan. That the US is giving Thailand the cold shoulder should not affect Thailand in the short term and Japan can make up for as a bridge to the western democracies. Against this backdrop and Japan's shift in strategic and defense policies, Thailand should look into maximizing benefits from the opportunities presented in this context, as well as study the challenges that could arise.

In forming policy recommendations for Thailand in dealing with Japan, there are a few points that must always be considered in the background;

1) Japan's interests and agenda for Thailand is two-fold. Apart from being Japan's largest production and investment base in Southeast Asia, Thailand is also strategically placed at the backyard of China. Thailand's kinship with China is uniquely linked by cultural and ethnic ties, and both have never had to endure any conflict in their shared histories. Japan's greatest fear against China's threat is how to contain China's influence over Thailand and protect its valuable investments and maintain its presence.

2) The people-to-people ties between Thailand and Japan is a uniquely deep and close relationship. Thai people have overcome resentment against Japan's World War aggressions to a level incomparable to any other country in the region, or of the world. The Japanese people appreciate this fact and their friendship with Thailand even more.

3) Thailand's political instability is a security dilemma for Japan and a dear cost to Thailand. Japanese investors' interest in Thailand is waning as Thailand repeatedly goes through political coups offering less assurance and increasing inconsistencies in its policies to facilitate foreign investment. The long years of political impasse and a widening social divide leaves Thailand facing the need to adjust its social infrastructure and accommodate greater political participation from an expanding middle class. Thailand's foreign policy has also suffered under such inconsistencies, instability and unaccountability from in-between politicians.

The Japanese Government therefore created the "Thailand Plus One" model for Japanese investors, to reduce and diversify risks by investing in a neighbouring country in addition to a base in Thailand. Thailand has picked up on this trend but is not fully aware of the fact that Japan is depreciating Thailand's value as a partner and finding the CLMV increasingly more attractive for investment. Nor has Thailand figured out a way to fully maximize this policy to its best potential.

4) Japan is using the US-Japan alliance as a basis for strengthening or creating security cooperation frameworks with other countries in the region, hedging against China. We have to discourage them from this, because this is a framework that excludes China and causes further tension and divisiveness in the region. Any kind of security cooperation framework that excludes some or all major players in the region is not conducive to peace and stability and will undermine ASEAN unity and centrality. Consultation and confidence-building is a vital part of sustaining peace and stability in a security arrangement, and ASEAN as a bloc should encourage this.

5) Although Abe's motives to create a political legacy in his career may serve personal interests, but he is also a realist and can be pragmatic. He has learned a valuable lesson from his failure during his first premiership. The changes he has made to accommodate yet another coup in Thailand proves it. Thailand should introduce this idea with Japan and help arrange such activities. But Japan should back down and not push Thailand too hard to choose between China or Japan.

6) However, the crux of the matter is, Abe may not want to resolve tensions as they can be instrumental in persuading the Japanese public to support his security policy reforms. Abe may have a good excuse for this thinking. Effective cooperation is missing in East Asia at present due to a lack of trust both between major powers and neighbouring countries with sovereignty disputes, the lack of agreed maritime boundaries, the widespread commitment to independence and sovereignty, a lack of support for relevant international regimes, inadequate capacity, and the lack of a strong political framework to guide cooperation. The existing confidence-building mechanisms such as ARF, EAS and ADMM appear to bear no relevance or effectiveness to Japan.

7) Since Thailand carries no historical baggage of resentment nor conflict with major players in the region and can be an honest broker to bridge misunderstandings or misperceptions between parties under conflict. We have a good track record of our active role in inviting DPRK to the ARF. Our deep involvement and consistent forward engagement with Myanmar, throughout decades of hard work, has finally brought the military regime in Myanmar to the realities of the world. While Myanmar still has a long path ahead in its reforms, it is nonetheless a case and lesson not to be taken granted for.

8) The upcoming events marking the 70th Anniversary of the end of World War II in September 2015 is another flashpoint in time waiting to happen. Statements from Japan, China, the ROK and expected missile launching practices by DPRK to mark the occasion are main drivers of the continued mistrust and inability to move

away from the past and move forward into the future. Thailand should encourage Japan to look at Vietnam and Thailand as an example. Vietnam was able to put the painful memories of Thailand's hurtful role with the US in the Vietnam War behind them and in 2013 chose to establish its first strategic partnership in the region, with Thailand. Vietnam chose to work on moving forward to secure a prosperous future instead of dwelling on the past. Where the past cannot be changed, it can be a lesson learned to make the future better by avoiding the same mistakes.

## **4.2 Policy Recommendations for Thailand**

4.2.1 Thailand's position on Japan's new security role should be made clear. We welcome the principle of Japan's proactive role to contribute to peace and stability in the region. However, any decision to allow JSDF collective self defense and deployment of military missions overseas must have clear rules, boundaries, and standard operational procedures that can assure that deployments serve the true purpose of defense and not aggression, and will not cause expansion of any further conflict or harm. Prior to any actions, Japan should consult closely with involved parties, and have full understanding and consent from those countries involved.

4.2.2 Thailand must not lose sight that Japan will still be looking to use Thailand as an instrument to win support from ASEAN members and other countries in the region as well as its own public on its role for proactive contribution to peace. Thailand must be cautious not to entertain any misperceptions that it in any way takes sides. It must stand firm with the consistent position that Thailand is a friend open for positive and constructive engagement from major players in the region. Thailand stands committed in its partnerships with traditional allies, and friends, and has ample room for meaningful partnerships with all of them. Thailand encourages and builds upon constructive cooperation and preventive diplomacy. Any format of consultations to minimize tension and bring about better understanding is welcomed. Not messages of provocation and divisiveness.

4.2.3 In this sense, Thailand needs to work with ASEAN members and to have them on the same page, constantly sending the same message: Japan needs to understand the fact that other nations in the region often do not perceive the same issues as security threats. Vietnam is a good example. Its perception of the threats emanating from China is independent of and different to Japan's, with Hanoi often responding to a more reserved fashion to perceived provocations from China in an effort to prevent a significant breach in its relations with Beijing. Similarly, the Park



Guen-hye administration is attempting to build a stronger relationship with China, partly to gain leverage over Beijing as an ally of North Korea and thereby isolate the Kim regime but also due to economic imperatives. In the case of India, while it may share the same concerns over the increasing assertiveness of Beijing, it does not have any maritime territorial disputes with China.

4.2.4 Therefore, ASEAN should take lead to help ease tensions among its plus three dialogue partners. These should be done correspondingly at two different levels; (1) behind closed doors with an aim to actually prevent or solve conflicts and; (2) at more open avenues, involving think tanks and research institutes to help circulate positive messages of cooperation to the wider public.

1) Behind closed doors, ASEAN should initiate a smaller forum or session where China, Japan and ROK Foreign Ministers can meet with the ASEAN Chair and some friends of the Chair to engage in a free flow of discussions on regional security concerns. Talks should be without a fixed agenda, and conducted off-record. The Chair and friends of the Chair can help facilitate a positive atmosphere conducive to open and frank conversations. A smaller setting could help ease tensions and bring about meaningful and practical solutions to whatever concerns the Foreign Ministers may have on their agenda. Since ASEAN already hosts ASEAN+3 sessions for Foreign Ministers and Heads of Government every year, it can be held parallel to these sessions, ARF or EAS. The same could be done at ADMM sessions.

2) An important reminder to all high level officials, is the respect and understanding that domestic politics play a decisive role in foreign politics and decision making among leaders, foreign ministers and defense ministers. Discussions, therefore, should also achieve an understanding, acceptance, and even a plan on how each country would deal with their media and press statements, in order to prevent escalation or more add more fuel to the fire. Therefore, there is a need to increase understanding amongst academicians to counter-balance negative speculation and information circulated in media.

3) ASEAN should work in parallel with the closed sessions, in a forward-looking manner, engaging Japan with China and ROK in Track 2 and Track 1.5 activities to discuss responses and avoiding conflict/incidents on ground, and increase better understanding and acceptance of one another. These can be created in the form of a think tank or eminent person network amongst interest countries. Prominent journalists who offer analyses on regional developments in different media groups could also be included in the discussions. The author recognizes that while there are already such existing activities taking place, however, these activities

appear to be one-sided events serving as a promotional event for the host, rather than actually working on viable solutions. The Shangri-La Dialogue is one example. The NEAT (Network of East Asian Think Tanks) have think tanks from members of ASEAN plus three included, but is not mandated to discuss traditional security issues.

The idea is not to create new mechanisms, but to have Track 2 activities endorsed by ASEAN and the plus three dialogue partners that deal with more sensitive topics, serve as brainstorming sessions, offering alternative solutions and easing fears and tensions across the region. Moreover, as new media technology become more accessible to the public, it is important to get the right people to say the right thing to the public at the right moment and allow these forward-thinking ideas to counter negative speculations that bring no viable solutions, and are widely circulated through social media.

4.2.5 The shift in Japan's security policies allows Japan to be more focused on military cooperation with members of ASEAN individually as well as with ASEAN as a bloc. Thailand should take advantage of this setting, especially to fill in the gaps where the Thai military is lacking and needs assistance. This will not only help assure Japan that Thailand remains a reliable and important partner for Japan, but serves as balancing act against China's assertiveness in Thailand.

The areas of cooperation that Thailand should focus on with Japan should not only respond to Thailand's own needs, but also be in tandem with Tokyo's policies. These can include development of maritime security technology, military equipment and military R&D. Currently, the ministries of defences of both sides are preparing a Memorandum of Intent on military cooperation which will outline guidelines and areas for collaboration. The document is planned for signing by ministers of defense of both countries at the Thai Defense Minister's visit to Tokyo planned to take place within this year. Other potential focus areas include the realm of cyber security and disaster management, as Thailand's Ministry of Information and Communication Technology and Japan's Ministry of International Affairs and Communications recently signed in April 2015, a Memorandum of Cooperation on joint ICT development, which included developing ICT for disaster prevention and cyber security.

4.2.6 Since Japan's economic performance will play a major role in Japan's new security posture, Thailand should work with Japan to enhance its own economic growth and regional posture in the Mekong Sub-region. Japan has also made use of regional economic frameworks as another key policy. This includes Japan's push for early conclusion of the RCEP with ASEAN and its ten dialogue

partners and other regional economic arrangements such as the TPP with the US. Moreover, Japan is trying to counter China's efforts to exert economic influence over the region with its new initiatives, such as the One Belt, One Road Strategy, and the introduction of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank or the AIIB, to respond to the recipient fatigue as opposed to donor fatigue by the Asian Development Bank, controlled by Japan and the World Bank. Japan is presently still reluctant to join the AIIB. Thailand should encourage Japan's inclusion in the AIIB as a check and balance against China's misconduct and inexperience in regulating financing schemes in the region.

Competition for economic presence in the Mekong Sub-Region between China and Japan has become more prominent in the past few years. Thailand plays a strategic role in this power play. It is important to signal to both countries, especially Japan, to engage with China constructively in this sub-region, as the new economic emergence due to recent opening up of CLMV countries still present many security concerns that require vigilance, and long-term planning of a comprehensive manner.

Japan has much expertise to share which will help counter any foreseeable mistakes by Chinese institutions which are less experienced in fiscal and monetary policies. Also, Japan needs to factor in the reality that the inclusion of China in an accountable, efficient financial infrastructure is indeed vital for the region's continued economic growth. More importantly, the region, as well as China and Japan, cannot afford to harbor any more economic and financial meltdowns at this crucial juncture.

4.2.7 Looking ahead, the competition between China and Japan in Thailand can be a useful tool in enhancing Thailand's economic growth and regional posture. Having both countries work together to develop Thailand's railway infrastructure which at several points must be physically joined to complete the whole route, can be a positive model for Japan and China to replicate and modify elsewhere in their relations with Thailand.

### **4.3 Conclusions**

Achievement of an optimistic scenario is dependent on a higher level of strategic trust in the region. This requires a marked shift in mind-set for all stakeholders from one of competition to one of cooperation. It involves the major stakeholders—China, India, Japan and the United States—finding common ground in their strategic interests and “backing off” from current adversarial and competitive positions. This may require giving China more influence and the United States

stepping back from its efforts to maintain its role as the dominant player in regional affairs. Specifically, in terms of policy, Washington would have to shift away from the military dimensions of rebalancing, including military support for protagonists in the sovereignty disputes, and focus more on its diplomatic and economic dimensions. The setting aside of disputes, the pursuit of cooperation and a focus on dispute management rather than dispute settlement would result in a “win-win” outcome for the region. To some extent, such an outcome will involve conceding a degree of regional leadership to China.

However, since this is not foreseeable yet in the future, there needs to be careful planning for managing incidents that may arise in flashpoints. The combination of arms build-up by nervous players such as Japan and China paired with the leadership of Abe and Xi who both are driven by strong domestic politics, is indeed a dangerous equation. Although on the political front, there are efforts by both Japan and China to arrange a meaningful summit at a historical time in September to mark the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, both will still need to have other many other layers of dialogues to achieve any substantial cooling down, agreement, and gain understanding from their respective peoples. ASEAN will have to step up as a bloc and truly speak in one voice, acting as another middle power to neutralize the bi-polar power play between the US/Japan against China. A united ASEAN can weaken the tensions on ground, as well as Japan’s mistaken and dangerous idea that it can move to “rescue” ASEAN member states in the South China Sea, should the necessity arise, on the principles of collective self-defense. Such a notion is not only risky, but will also inadvertently cause unnecessary tensions and possible clashes when military activities increase in the area. There is an urgent need to strengthen not only confidence-building measures but also mechanisms to deal with emergency incidents, such as hotlines, to coordinate and prevent further escalation should any accidents occur. Early conclusion of the Code of Conduct on the South China Sea is vital not only for its initial intended purpose. But it also signifies the ability of ASEAN to deal with its own problems in the region, with another major power. It also means that other major powers such as the US and Japan need not be too deeply involved in matters where ASEAN is already in control.

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